

**Title: An Examination of the Satiric Vision of Ahmadou Kourouma
in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*.**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Ahmadou Kourouma's *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, a novel that mainly satirizes post-colonial African dictatorships. Kourouma entrusts his narrative to a satirical griot-narrator, and the novel adopts a mock-epic mode. This complicates the novel's narrative, and allows the reader to compare the satiric and griotic forms in the examination of Kourouma's overall satiric vision. In his satirization of post-colonial African forms of governance, Kourouma puts to maximum use oral literary techniques such as proverbs, repetition, and song, as satiric tools for mocking, criticising and attacking human folly and wickedness. Both satire and the mock-epic modes' affinity with parody, fantasy, and myth are extensively explored in this thesis. This thesis argues that the combination of griotic and satiric methods that characterizes *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* make it a questioning, demystifying, and subversive novel, giving it a magical realist and post-modernist flavour. In examining Kourouma's literary methods, this thesis uses Thomas Hale's extensive work on the griotic roles in West Africa. This, it is hoped, will further illuminate Kourouma's satiric vision. Hale calls griots masters of the spoken word. This is an important observation since this thesis argues that Kourouma's use of language in the construction and deconstruction of social power relations elevates him to a position of a literary griot in the modern post-colonial setting. The other similarity between the griotic and satiric methods that is explored at length in this thesis is the satirist and griot's predilection for historical and moral issues. Kourouma's mythicization of Africa's recent history is examined through what Paul Ricoeur calls the "hermeneutics of suspicion" and the "hermeneutics of affirmation", which refer to the unmasking of myth with the intention of extracting its positive value as a symbolic tool for the exploration of human future possibilities. Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque is also utilized in illuminating Kourouma's use of the *donsomana*, or purificatory tale, which this thesis argues is comparable to the European medieval carnivals. Both the *donsomana* and the carnivals are not just occasions for harmless fun, but they can be seen as opportunities for the inversion of social hierarchical roles with the aim of bringing about social change, if not a total revolution in social and political systems. Bakhtin also claims that 'the bodily grotesque' can be used ambivalently as an image of permanent degradation, or as an image of debasement with regeneration in view. This notion is used in this thesis in

examining the appropriation of the images of the bodily life by both the griot - narrator and the post-colonial dictators. This thesis argues that the griot uses these images for their positive symbolic effect, while the dictators use the same images for the sinister purpose of degrading victims of their cruel rule. This thesis also looks at the way Kourouma contrasts nationalist anti-colonial struggle with the so-called democratic anti-dictatorship struggle, as a way of showing that ideal solutions to Africa's leadership crisis do not work. Finally, this thesis suggests that Kourouma's pessimistic satire, although specifically targeting post-colonial African governance, is ultimately about the cruel and ineffective leadership that has characterized political affairs since the dawn of human history.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie tesis ondersoek Ahmadou Kourouma se *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, 'n roman wat hoofsaaklik post-koloniale Afrika-diktatorskappe satiriseer. Kourouma se narratief word aan 'n spottende *griot*-verteller toevertrou, en die roman ontvou in komies-epiese toonaard. Hierdie faktor kompliseer die narratief en laat die leser toe om die satiriese en *griot*-vorme met mekaar te vergelyk in die bestudering van Kourouma se oorhoofse satiriese visie. In sy satirisering van post-koloniale regeringsvorme in Afrika maak Kourouma maksimaal gebruik van orale letterkundige tegnieke, soos bv. spreekwoorde, herhalings en liederes, as satiriese werktuie waarmee hy menslike domheid en boosheid bespot, kritiseer en aanval. Beide satiriese en komies-epiese vorme se affiniteit met parodie, fantasie en mite word uitgebreid ondersoek in hierdie tesis. Die tesis voer aan dat die kombinasie van *griot*- en satiriese metodes wat *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* karakteriseer, dit 'n vraagstellende, demistifiserende en subversiewe roman maak en gevolglik 'n magies-realistiese en postmodernistiese flair aan die roman gee. Die proefskrif maak gebruik van Thomas Hale se uitgebreide navorsing oor die funksie van die *griot*-figuur in Wes-Afrikaanse samelewings om Kourouma se literêre metodes te ondersoek met die doel om Kourouma se satiriese visie verder te belig. Hale beskryf *griots* as 'meesters van die gesproke woord' – 'n belangrike opmerking, aangesien die tesis argumenteer dat Kourouma se gebruik van taal in die konstruksie en dekonstruksie van sosiale magsverhoudings hom verhef tot die posisie van 'n literêre *griot* in die moderne post-koloniale omgewing. Die ander vergelykbaarheid tussen die *griot*- en satiriese metodes wat deeglik ondersoek word in hierdie tesis is die satiris en die *griot* se

ingesteldheid op historiese en morele kwessies. Kourouma se mitifisering van Afrika se onlangse geskiedenis word ondersoek deur middel van wat Paul Ricoeur die “hermeneutics of suspicion” en die “hermeneutics of affirmation” noem – uitdrukkings wat verwys na die ontmaskering van mite – met die doel om die positiewe waarde daarvan as ‘n simboliese werktuig vir die ondersoek van toekomstige menslike moontlikhede te ontsluit. Bakhtin se teorie van die “carnavalesque” word ook benuttig in Kourouma se gebruik van die *donsomana*, of reinigingsverhaal, wat volgens die argument van hierdie tesis vergelykbaar is met die middeleeuse karnaval-feeste. Beide die *donsomana* en die karnaval is nie net okkasies vir onskuldige pret nie, maar kan gesien word as geleenthede vir die inversie van sosiaal-hierargiese rolle met die doel om sosiale veranderings teweeg te bring – of selfs vir die totale omverwerping van sosiale en politieke sisteme. Bakhtin beweer ook dat “the bodily grotesque” op ambivalente wyse gebruik kan word as beeld van permanente degradasie, of as beeld van vernedering met die oog op herlewing. Hierdie idee word in die tesis gebruik in die eksaminering van die appropriasie van die beelde van liggaamlike lewe deur beide die *griot*-verteller en die post-koloniale diktators. Hierdie tesis argumenteer dat die *griot* hierdie beelde gebruik vir hul positiewe simboliese effekte, terwyl die diktators dieselfde beelde gebruik vir sinistêre doelwitte – om die slagoffers van hul wrede bewind te verneder. Die tesis bestudeer ook die wyse waarop Kourouma die nasionalistiese anti-koloniale stryd kontrasteer met die sogenaamde demokratiese anti-diktatorskapstryd, ten einde te demonstreer dat idealistiese oplossings vir Afrika se leierskapskrisis nie werk nie. Ten laaste suggereer die proefskrif dat Kourouma se pessimistiese satire, hoewel spesifiek gemik op post-koloniale Afrika-regerings, uiteindelik begaan is met wrede en oneffektiewe leierskap soos wat dit dwarsdeur die geskiedenis menslike politieke sake kenmerk.

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INTRODUCTION

a) General

In trying to narrativize African post-colonial governance a writer is confronted with follies and atrocities of unutterable magnitude. James N. Powell argues: “Any art attempting to represent [African post-colonial dictatorships] should continue to represent the unrepresentable, to say the unsayable” (1998, 21). It is fitting then that in fictionalizing the most disturbing power abuses of the post-colonial era, Ahmadou Kourouma in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* chose the satiric mode. Satire has the versatility and dynamism to ‘represent the unrepresentable and say the unsayable’. In a eulogy of the satiric literary form, Gilbert Highet summarizes some of the main strategies employed by satirists:

Hail, satire! Hail, clear-eyed, sharp-tongued, outwardly disillusioned and secretly idealistic Muse! Mother of comedy and Sister of Tragedy, defender and critic of Philosophy, hail! You are a difficult companion, a mistress sometimes elusive and tantalizing, sometimes harsh and repellent; but in your mercurial presence no one is ever bored. Stupidity, Self-satisfaction, Corruption, the Belief in Inevitable Progress – these intellectual monsters, produced spontaneously from the waste energy of the human minds, you have destroyed again and again. Still they are reborn, and still you rise to destroy them. (1962, p. 243)

As Highet suggests in his playful praise of satire, satirists try to be as clear-eyed as possible in their works through such techniques as detached graphic descriptions of events and human actions. In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, this is evident in the detailed descriptions of the meticulous tortures that African post-colonial dictators mete out to their real or imagined opponents. Highet also refers to satire as being sharp-tongued. This captures the satirists’ use of words as instruments for inflicting pain that leads to shame in their victims. Kourouma uses the indecorous tongue of Bingo the griot-narrator and that of Tiécoura his apprentice to cause a lot of discomfort for Koyaga and the rest of his fellow African dictators. As a satirist,

Kourouma seems to be motivated by a deep-seated anger against post-colonial Africa's lack of leaders who are just and oriented towards economic development.

Highet also calls satire a Muse, one of the Greek goddesses of the arts. This is an association satire deserves because it is capable of forceful ambivalence and ambiguity in articulating its aims and goals. As Highet points out, satirists appear to be incurably disillusioned, but the fact that they attack what they perceive to be evil may be an indication that satirists harbour idealistic motives. Although Kourouma does not offer alternatives or solutions to post-colonial Africa's leadership crisis, he is very clear-cut about his satiric targets, and he does not have any doubts about himself. His unremitting condemnation of the failures of all those involved in determining the political and economic destiny of Africa, also suggests that he yearns for better times. However, the satirist must always strive to maintain his or her apparent outsider status so that he or she remains as unsullied as possible by the muck-racking that he or she is often engaged in. This is exactly what Kourouma tries to do throughout *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*.

In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, Kourouma often describes the tragic misrule of post-colonial Africa in detached, comic terms. Satire's ability to be playful while handling very serious and at times tragic issues, is what Highet refers to when he calls satire "Mother of Comedy, [and] Sister of Tragedy". Summarizing some satiric methods, Brown and Kimmey argue: "Satire ... ranges from almost open invective to whimsical play" (1968, p. 3). There is plenty of both invective and the playful in Kourouma's satirical representation of post-colonial African governance. However, Kourouma steers clear of the purely comic in that, unlike the comic artist who seems to accept the world, he does not accept the status quo at all.

Kourouma's satire also rejects the simple view that African traditional forms of governance were better than colonial administration, or the belief that black leaders who took over power from the departing European colonizers are better by mere virtue of their masquerading as nationalist liberators. Furthermore, Kourouma refuses to accept the popular view that democratic sloganeering will bring better times to the African political and economic landscape. This rejection of all idealistic agendas by satirists is what Highet captures when he calls satire "defender and critic of

Philosophy”. Philosophy here seems to refer to all formalized categories of human knowledge and wisdom, and the need to constantly question them in order to avoid dangerous sterility and stagnation in human creativity.

In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, Kourouma persuades the reader to share his views about how ‘normal’ people and rulers ought to behave. In other words, he cleverly manipulates the reader into creating a moral yardstick against which the reader measures the ridiculous behaviour of both the people and the rulers that he portrays. The satirist can be described as a deceitful friend, because he or she pretends not to have any moral views in order to gain the reader’s confidence. Because of satire’s ability to be very enticing to the reader while at the same time being very provocative to those that it attacks, Highet says it is a “difficult companion, a mistress sometimes elusive and tantalizing, sometimes harsh and repellent” (1962, p. 243).

One thing that the readers of *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* are assured of is the need for perpetual alertness throughout the text. Kourouma does not allow his readers to be complacent and to relax since they are constantly implicated in the evils and atrocities that he satirizes. Highet puts it well when he says that where there is satire there is no one who is ever bored. In his sweeping satire, Kourouma attacks most forms of stupidity, self-satisfaction and corruption. Since most of humanity seems to have a compulsive attraction to these evils, Kourouma’s satire is likely to remain relevant for a long time. His satire seems to be especially formulated to attack, and if possible destroy, these evils.

Kourouma uses the mock-epic mode in his narrative and this enables him to explore and satirize traditional African forms of knowledge. In his use of the mock-epic structure in the satirization of post-colonial systems of governance, Kourouma shows that there is more than mere mythic or symbolic meaning to the many details in African traditional systems portrayed in some of the most celebrated African epics. By satirizing the epic mode, he enables the reader to question the logic of powers claimed by African epic heroes, and by extension by African post-colonial dictators, and the fate of people who find themselves victims of the whims of these individuals. Through his mock-epic about Koyaga and other African dictators, Kourouma seems to suggest that what is commonly viewed as Africa’s heroic past was also

characterized by the same capriciousness that is seen in all African dictators portrayed in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*. Kourouma's mock-epic suggests that in studying epics, whether as literary or cultural legacies, Africans must ask questions that might help them address problems of today created by the fault-lines of history (Okpewho, 2004, p. 113).

b) Chapter Outline

Chapter One frames Kourouma's satire in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* within the wider concerns of satire in general. Satire as an aggressive tool that attacks human folly, weakness and hypocrisy is examined within the context of the general themes of post-colonial African fictional literature. The suitability of the mock-epic form for the satirization of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial systems of governance is assessed in this chapter.

The professional handling of language plays an important role in all literary forms, and this is more so with satirists, who often wield words as surgical instruments for the clearing of social debris which accumulates wherever there are human encounters. Using Bakhtin's notions of heteroglossia and hybrid discourse, and other literary theories, Chapter Two looks at how language constructs and deconstructs power within social settings. This chapter also focuses on Kourouma's unique literary style, whereby he incorporates Malinke proverbs and other word forms to create a hybrid English (originally French), which can be seen as an African writer's attempt to demystify the former colonizer's language and appropriate it in order to 'write back to the Empire' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989). But Kourouma does not limit himself to such a narrow project of writing back to the metropolitan centre. Ato Quayson argues that such a venture forecloses the possibility of more complicated pursuits in what postcolonial writing aspires to by instituting a singular, and in many respects distorted view of the kind of politics it imagines itself engaged in (2000, p. 77). Instead, Kourouma uses and 'misuses' the former colonizer's language for, among other purposes, interrogating the role this language plays in the internal political, social and economic struggles of independent Africa.

It is noteworthy that Kourouma assigns most of his long narrative in *Waiting for the Wild Beast to Vote* to a West African griot. Thomas Hale (1998) describes griots as

masters and mistresses of the spoken word. Chapter Three examines the many roles of the griot that are described by Hale in his extensive pioneering work, *Griot and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music*, on the griotic social functions. These roles are put side by side with the satiric functions that Kourouma makes his griot and apprentice griot perform in his novel. Chapter Three attempts to show that griots perform socially ambivalent roles, and this makes most griotic methods comparable to satiric methods. The griots' and satirists' common interest in morality and history will be discussed in the light of Kourouma's larger thematic concerns in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*.

In *Rabelais and His World* (1984) Bakhtin emphasizes the central role played by images of the bodily life and what he calls the "grotesque body" in the satirical works of Francois Rabelais. In an attempt to understand Kourouma's satiric methods in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, Chapter Four uses Bakhtin's theories about satire's penchant for focusing on the lower bodily strata and other bodily orifices as a tool of degradation with the intention of effecting regeneration. This chapter will note that while the lower bodily strata and other bodily functions are used by the satirist for purposes of debasement with a view to inducing some social rebirth, most African post-colonial dictators in Kourouma's novel are portrayed as trying to usurp these images, and appropriating them as evil tools for permanent degradation. The ambivalent role of these images will be emphasized.

Chapter Five highlights Kourouma's use of the *donsomana* or purificatory tale, as Bingo the griot calls it, in his satirization of African post-colonial dictatorships. Bakhtin's notions of the carnivalesque and the grotesque body will be explored further in this chapter in trying to understand how the inversion of social roles during European carnivals parallels that of Kourouma's *donsomana*. A comparative analysis of the carnivalesque and Kourouma's *donsomana* will illuminate Kourouma's satiric methods and aims in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*.

In Chapter Six, Kourouma's accelerated transformation of Africa's recent history into myth will be noted and discussed in relation to his broader satiric aims. Kourouma's use of myth will be examined through what Paul Ricoeur calls the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' and the 'hermeneutics of affirmation' (1991, p. 66), whereby myth is

unmasked, but at the same time its potential and positive value as a symbolic instrument for the exploration of future human possibilities is acknowledged.

Chapter Seven is an historical case study of Kourouma's satirical exposé of the post-colonial dictators in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, showing how historical accounts of the dictators shed light on Kourouma's satiric version of them. This will be done in an effort to show that Kourouma does not use disproportionate exaggeration in his presentation of the post-colonial African leadership crisis. Kourouma's honest, brutal and often hilarious account of Africa's dictators stands as a writer's satirical expression of his disenchantment with Africa's sad post-colonial state of affairs.

Kourouma's extensive satiric work does not spare anybody. His satiric brush brutally sweeps through the pre-colonial African period, colonial times, and post-colonial era, exposing the West's hypocritical politics, so-called African democratic leaders, and the stupefied and wavering African masses. This far-reaching satiric exposé is dealt with in Chapter Eight, titled "Democracy: A Satiric Representation of the African Post-colonial Democratization Process in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*".

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

James Ngugi shows how difficult it is to draw out and formulate laws and standards by which to place a satirical novel within a literary genre when he says, “satire takes, for its province, a whole society for its purpose and criticism” (Ngugi in Pieterse and Munro, p. 56). William Henry Hudson points out that it is hard to formulate laws and standards of judging novels in general because the novel is the “most elastic and irregular of all the great forms of literary expression” (Hudson 1945, p.130). Mikhail Bakhtin also acknowledges the exceptionally complex nature of the narrative modes of the novel when he says the novel is a “diversity of social speech types...and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized ” in which a battle takes place “in discourse and among discourses to become the language of truth” (1981, p. 262). In the novel, satire often occurs as a parasitic form, never really able to inhabit the whole novel as a distinct genre. This is to be expected since it is very difficult to have sustained satire in long writings.

It is important to bear in mind the above observations because this thesis will examine a large African satiric novel, *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* by Ahmadou Kourouma from Côte d’Ivoire. In this novel events are viewed from the privileged position of the president’s griot. Although the events are apparently narrated by a griot, Kourouma is able to present the reader with interestingly complex and conflicting perspectives. It is primarily the voice of Bingo the griot-narrator that the reader hears most of the time, but the reader often hears the voice of Tiécoura, the apprentice griot. At other times it is Maclédio’s voice that is heard, the president’s right hand man. Sometimes it is the president himself who speaks when he feels that his life story is being misrepresented. On other occasions the narrator eludes identification altogether. All this supports Hudson’s argument that the novel as a literary expression is a form that is very elastic and irregular, and Bakhtin’s keen observation that the novel is a diversity of social speech types. In recognition of the above observations, this thesis will not try to formulate laws and standards for Kourouma’s satire, but rather it will seek to examine his artistic vision as this manifests itself in a variety of forms which satire usually inhabits.

One of the justifications for examining *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is that it is one of the largest, and definitely one of the most wide-ranging satiric works on post-colonial African governance. Kourouma's satire on post-colonial African governance is so ambitious to the extent that it strides across the entire African continent. It literally satirizes African post-colonial rule from 'Cape to Cairo', so to speak. It will therefore be interesting to see how Kourouma handles material across such a vast field of post-colonial cultural backgrounds. This thesis will, first and foremost, contend that *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* insist on being read as a registration of post-colonial disillusionment about Africa's sad state of affairs by its author. It is not the intention of this thesis to limit the application of Kourouma's satire to the post-colonial African setting though. This writer is convinced that Kourouma's satire is far-reaching and that his work satirizes the follies, not only of so-called African Nationalist leaders and their erstwhile colonial masters, but also those of pre-colonial times. This thesis will therefore seek to show that the insights to be gained from examining Kourouma's satire have a wider application. Kourouma seems to be very sceptical of humankind's ability to solve their problems in a way that ensures the happiness and the security of the majority of the earth's inhabitants.

However, the primary target of Kourouma's satire is post-colonial African governance. This is supported by the fact that *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* was first published in 1998, many decades after the attainment of independence by almost all of the African countries. One would therefore expect that most of Africa would by now have made a lot of progress towards the economic, social and political emancipation of its people. In the light of the foregoing, this thesis will argue that the title of Kourouma's novel, *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, registers the pessimism caused by the catastrophic situation of post-colonial Africa. The title suggests that something is terribly wrong in Africa. It is therefore fitting that in Kourouma's novel it is the beasts that are being waited upon to go and vote. Post-colonial Africa is indeed as Bingo, the main narrator in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* describes it, "freedom-butcher [and] rich in violators of human rights as it is in hyenas" (Kourouma, p.283, 320). The satiric nature of the title of this novel is a sincere and sad expression of disappointed hopes, not only of this author, but of most patriotic Africans.

In an article entitled “The Novel of Post-independence Disillusionment in Central Africa”, T. Kitenge-Ngoy observes:

Those who had founded their hopes on the revolutionary dynamism of the young independent states, those who expected to see the disappearance of extreme poverty, privation and hunger could only be disappointed. (1996, p. 169)

As Kitenge-Ngoy’s words suggest, African dictatorships are not only freedom-butcherers, they also lead to the abject poverty of whole populations. The end of European colonialism for most Africans has led to a much more cruel and sinister form of colonialism. People’s human rights are now being violated by their own kind. The main argument of this thesis will be that the principal element which constitutes *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is the satirization of the corrupt and inhumane forms of governance that have characterized Africa since colonial times up to the post-independent era. It will be the contention of this work that Kourouma moves in and out of the satiric mode because the satiric mode is a mode that is difficult to sustain in a long narrative. The narrative of Kourouma in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* therefore inevitably oscillates between the satiric mode and the realistic mode. Kourouma also moves in and out of the satiric mode because in Bakhtin’s words, “the novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice” (in D. J Hale 2006, p. 484). As Bakhtin further argues, there are heterogeneous stylistic unities that enter the novel and combine to form a structured artistic system and are subordinated to the higher stylistic unity of the work as a whole, a unity that cannot be identified with any single one of the unities subordinated to it. According to this view, the variety of individual voices and the multiple forms and styles in the novel are prerequisites for authentic novelistic prose. The occasional movements out of the satirical mode by Kourouma should therefore be viewed as strengths rather than weaknesses.

This thesis will also argue that Kourouma’s novel can be read at a magic-realist level. In an article entitled “Magical Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centres” Theo L. D’Haen notes that the term magical realism “has been used to cover various types of painting in which objects are depicted with photographic naturalism

but which because of paradoxical elements or strange juxtapositions convey a feeling of unreality, infusing the ordinary with a sense of mystery” (2004, p. 191). Emphasizing the need to marry fantastic imagination with realism in works of art, Franz Roh in an article entitled “Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism” argues that “humanity seems destined to oscillate forever between devotion to the world of dreams and adherence to the world of reality. And, really if this breathing rhythm of history was to cease, it might signal the death of the spirit” (2004, p.17). This devotion to the world of dreams which is referred to by Franz Roh is clearly seen in the extraordinary events that characterize Koyaga’s childhood and youth in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*.

In the opening pages of the novel, the reader is presented with the apparently ordinary and natural setting of an African president sitting with some of his top advisors. The setting however does not remain a realistic one for long. It is suddenly turned into a magical and fantastic one when the reader realizes that this is no ordinary setting where the president calls up his advisors to help him with pressing state issues. This is a magical rite that the president was advised to undertake when it so happened that he found himself in an extremely difficult situation. Bingo the griot enlightens the reader about the purpose of this gathering when he says:

For years, your *maman* and the marabout had told you [president Koyaga] time and again what you must do if you were to find yourself lost: you must have your purificatory rite as a master hunter, your cathartic *donsomana* recounted by a *sora*, a chronicler of hunters and his responder. (Kourouma, p. 444)

So the reciting of Koyaga’s heroic deeds and his life story will somehow mysteriously and miraculously infuse him with wisdom and power to deal with his predicament. It is at this point that the reader realises how far the novel has drifted and will drift from the world of reality into the world of fantasy. According to Franz Roh this endless movement of literature from the world of reality into the world of dreams is the breathing rhythm of history, which should never cease if any art is to be of any consequence.

This thesis will argue that Kourouma's very narrative structure whereby the whole novel is structured as a mock-praise poem elevates his novel to a magical realist level. Stephen Slemon has this to say about magical realism:

The term 'magic realism' is an oxymoron, one that suggests a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly, of fantasy. In the language of narrative in a magic realist text, a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working towards the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other. Since the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked into a continuous dialectic with the "other," a situation which creates a disjunction within each of the two separate discursive systems, rending them with gaps, absences and silences. (2003, p. 409)

Slemon's words have been quoted at length because his views about magic realism correspond with what the writer of this work considers is satire's way of operation. This work will argue that *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* does not only read as a magical realist text, but that its narrative is imbued with an unmistakable satirical spirit. Fantasy working in binary opposition with realism is one of the prerequisites of good satire. This work will argue that it is in the continuous dialectic processes of fantasy and realism, in the "disjunctions, gaps, absences and silences," that satire's bite and poignancy manifests itself. It is here that satire communicates its moral messages. This work will therefore seek to show disjunctions, gaps and silences in the text under examination in an attempt to show how satire and magic realist texts operate.

The theoretical framework of this work has roughly been drawn. Firstly, *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* will be read as a true historical account of a number of African countries, which Kourouma relates in satirical terms and with cold and detached irony. Secondly, some sections of this novel will be read as post-modernistic pessimism, in which the author registers his disillusionment with the lack of good governance in post-independent Africa. Ralph Goodman argues that satire is grounded in the world and consistently refers to historical and

contemporary events and ideas in the world outside itself (Goodman 2000, p. 86). Indeed the existence of *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* as a serious satirical work seems to depend on its explicit reference to historical and contemporary events and ideas in the world outside itself.

Thirdly, this thesis will seek to show that *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is a mock-epic and a mock epic operates through the satirical subversion of the epic mode. It can be argued therefore that a mock-epic is by its very nature a work of satire. An examination of the griotic methods alongside the satiric methods will be done in an attempt to show how they illuminate Kourouma's stylistic techniques. To this end, reference will be made to other heroic epics of note, such as *Sundiata*, and others for purposes of comparison. This work will also seek to show that the fantastic elements that are juxtaposed with the realistic elements which permeate this novel is an indication that satire, as a literary form, can not exist without allying itself to these and other literary forms. Ashley Brown and John L Kimmey argue: "Satire is not an exclusive mode [but] it operates in various forms" (1968, p. 4). This is the view of satire that this thesis endorses.

The Mock Epic and Satirical Forms in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*

As has been argued above, the novel *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is a mock-epic about post-colonial African styles of leadership. In true epics, distinction, a sense of honour, a concern for justice and the dignity of human life are major qualities of the epic hero. For example in *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali*, the griot says that during the reign of Sundiata "justice prevailed everywhere ... Djata's justice spared nobody. He followed the very word of God. He protected the weak against the strong" (pp.81-82). Isidore Okpewho (1979, p.34) defines an African epic as "a tale about the fantastic deeds of a man or men endowed with something larger than the normal human context" which was usually recited by a griot. In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, Koyaga is consistently portrayed as a self-serving, bloodthirsty dictator. All other African dictators who feature in the narrative also lack moral values, nor are they devoted to their duties as nation leaders as the structure of the epic requires. As for Koyaga, the main hero of the tale, he does not possess any sense of honour and

justice, and his charity and generosity are calculated moves meant to perpetuate his atrocious reign.

Bingo's imitation of the epic structure achieved by borrowing material from mythology, legends, panegyrics and laments, and from history, is a satirical presentation which questions the way these traditional forms have been appropriated by impostors for selfish ends. In epics, Anny Wynchank argues, the griot is "aware of his importance and status as a griot" (in Losambe 1996, p. 5). In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* Kourouma satirizes not only the dictators, but also the storyteller; the griot is not spared Kourouma's verbal attacks. In true griot style, Bingo, Koyaga's griot, emphasizes his importance and status when he brags:

I am Bingo, the *sora*; I sing, I pay tribute and pluck the *cora*. A *sora* is a teller of tales, one who relates the stories of hunters to spur their heroes to greater feats. Remember the name of Bingo, I am the griot, the poet and chronicler, the musician of this brotherhood of hunters. (Kourouma, p. 2)

These words suggest that griots were too close to the criminals to remain unsullied. Bingo's relationship with his patron begins when Koyaga is still but a youth. For example, when Koyaga is discharged from the French colonial army and comes home loaded with cash, Bingo the griot is among the throng that welcomes the hero. Recalling this occasion, Bingo says: "We organized a welcome for him – as *sora*, I was among the party, for Koyaga was already a master hunter. We prepared for him a welcoming befitting the greatness of his glory, his wealth and his good fortune" (Kourouma, p. 71). The use of the collective pronoun 'we', emphasizes the griot's complicity in what Koyaga turns out to be. According to Thomas A. Hale, one of the roles of a griot is that of an adviser to the ruler or patron (1998, p. 24). Hale further points out that the griot's role as an adviser was to explain what his or her patron did not understand because the griot was "more attuned to the world around [him]" (p. 29). Unfortunately, even at this early stage, Bingo completely fails to properly guide his protégé/patron, but he participates in the squandering of his Indo-China war gratuity in four months of endless carousing.

Satirists also aspire to the role of society's advisers through their scathing criticism of human folly and weaknesses. For example, Matthew Hodgart argues that "satire at all levels must entertain as well as try to influence conduct, and [that] entertainment comes chiefly from the joy of hearing a travesty, a fantastic inversion of the world" (1969, p. 20). Joanna Lott also argues that among such functions as being historians, genealogists, advisors to nobility, messengers and praise-singers, griots and griottes were also entertainers. Bingo's words are obviously intended to entertain, but they also constitute criticism clothed as praise (2002, p.1).

This thesis will seek to show that *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is indeed "a witty and wholly authentic chronicle of black African atrocity," as David Caute puts it in *The Spectator* of May 2003. It will also argue that as masters and mistresses of verbal art the griots and griottes accumulated a lot of undefined power over their patrons and the society in general since they seem to have played a very big role in defining an individual's place in society by their ability to turn events into narrative. The reputation of the person whose tale the griot told did not only rest on his or her deeds, but also on how the griots and griottes portrayed these accomplishments for generations to come. Viewed from this perspective, Kourouma's portrayal of Bingo becomes a comment on the role that narrative plays in the construction of power. Through Koyaga's story, Kourouma is prodding the reader to think about the important role of the creators of history - those who tell stories of a people's past.

In post-colonial Africa, the novel becomes an important instrument in the interpretation of history. These sentiments are shared by Lokangaka Losambe who argues: "The African novel is a creative interpretation of history [and] there are those [novels] which evoke the post-independence social and political climate" (1996, p.16). Expressing similar views, James Ngugi in *Protest and Conflict in African Literature* argues that in discussing the African satirist we should see him or her in his or her social and political setting. Ngugi sees the role of an African satirist as that of a committed social and political commentator. He writes:

It is not enough for the African artist, standing aloof, to view society and highlight its weaknesses. He must try to go beyond this, to seek out the sources, the causes and the trends ... The artist in his writings

is not exempted from the struggle...By diving into the source he can give moral direction and vision to the struggle which, though suffering temporary reaction, is continuous ... (Ngugi, 1969, p. 56)

Ngugi belongs to the school of thought that believes that an artist has a very important message, which can change the world. In other words, Ngugi is advocating that all African literary writers be of the socialist realist stable. Unfortunately, as will become clear in this thesis, writers of the critical socialist realist stable usually sacrifice art for what they perceive to be the very important and socially transforming message that they urgently have to communicate. Although Kourouma is not a socialist realist writer he is certainly not “standing aloof,” since through his novel he is engaging with society and highlighting its weaknesses. However, his novel cannot be confined to any narrow role since it refuses to prescribe solutions to the problems that it so clearly diagnoses.

Generally, most satirists act as social and political commentators. It is also true that most satirists set themselves certain standards through which they criticise society when and where it departs from these norms. However, these standards are never clearly defined or openly stated, since most satirists covertly invite their readers to assume the same standards and to share the satirists’ indignation that moves them to pour derision and ridicule on society’s failings. Pointing to the danger of a satirist allying himself too much with views such as those of Ngugi, Goodman argues: “satirists may have to take care lest they become too committed to one particular party, and thus imprisoned in an ideology which turns them into little more than political hacks” (Goodman, 2000, p. 96). This writer is also of the opinion that one attraction of satire as a literary genre is the fact that the satirist’s moral stance is never overtly stated. Kourouma’s ambiguity in passing moral judgements is what makes his satire very fascinating in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*. Alvin B. Kernan, in *Modern Satire* also shares this view of satire when he argues:

Although there is always at least a suggestion of some kind of humane ideal in satire – it may in the blackest of satire exist only as the unnamed opposite of the idiocy and villainy portrayed – this ideal is never heavily stressed, for in the satirist’s vision of the

world decency is forever in a precarious position near the edge of extinction, and the world is about to pass into eternal darkness.
(1962, p. 168)

The role of the satirist advocated by Kernan is very useful for reading Kourouma when in one sweep he satirizes pre-colonial Africa, the colonizers, the colonized, the so-called nationalists who took over power after colonial rule, and the democrats who tried to unseat nationalist leaders who had turned into dictators. This refusal to be pinned down to any one moral stance enables Kourouma to transcend all the occasions that he satirizes and enables the reader to see that the instances of stupidity or cruelty that he satirizes, be they personal or communal, represent more than the issues at hand.

This thesis will argue that *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is a creative interpretation of history par excellence. This thesis will also seek to show that *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is "part magic, part history, part savage satire [and] is nothing less than the history of post-colonial Africa", as Frank Wynne says on the cover page of his 2004 English translation of the novel. It is the distorted notions of voting that Koyaga holds which the novel's title *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* satirizes. The novel's title also satirises those who are ruled for their inability to seize the voting opportunity presented to them, to rid themselves of the emasculating dictator. In addition, Kourouma ridicules the West for its double standards in its relationship with Africa.

Voting is largely reckoned as a process that only rational and intelligent beings freely and actively engage in to express their views about leadership, and especially political leadership. In all cases in order for the elections to be seen as free and fair, and in order for them to be morally acceptable to the majority, the voters should have a basic knowledge of what they are doing and they should not be coerced or intimidated to do someone else's will. Ahmadou Kourouma's novel title suggests that something has gone wrong since humans seem to have given up their right to vote to brute wild beasts. The title therefore implies that in Africa the wait for true democracy will be a long one. First the wild beasts have to become domestic animals, and then move up the evolutionary ladder to become rational beings before they can meaningfully

participate in the process of voting. The novel title is a multiple edged satirical sword aimed at, among other things, power hungry African dictators, the naive and gullible population of voters and the Western countries for attempting to play God over the destinies of African states.

This thesis will seek to show that the novel *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is a “brutal and fascinating work” of political satire. Satire is mainly concerned with exposing some flaw or excess, and this is true of *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*. Wit and humour are major features of satire and indeed satire can be very funny, but satire should not necessarily be identified with comedy. As will be seen in the examination of *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, large sections of the novel are satirical without being humorous at all. Ralph Goodman argues: “Humour is one of the weapons or strategies of satirists, but it’s not their end, and the satirist is both more hostile and in earnest than the humorist” (Goodman, 2000, p. 66). Ways of exposing weaknesses and bad character traits are numerous, and among others they may include the playful, wit, and even the vitriolic. Kourouma’s *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* includes all of these and more. This thesis will argue that Kourouma’s *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is “a brilliant [and] often a hilarious political satire” and that its success lies in its subversion of well-known aspects of the heroic epic. It is this sustained artistic subversion of the expected qualities of an epic which led the *British Independent Newspaper* to refer to *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* as “a tour de force - original, irreverent, brutal, funny, poetic - in which history and myth are brilliantly evoked” (2001, p. 14).

As already alluded to, Kourouma adopts the style of praise poetry in his mockery of post-colonial African forms of governance. The whole novel is a *donsomana* or a mock-epic on Koyaga’s long dictatorial rule. Isidore Okpewho defines an oral epic as “a tale about the fantastic deeds of a man or men endowed with something larger than the normal human context [which] is significant in portraying some stage of the culture or development of a people. It is narrated or performed to the background of music by an unlettered singer working alone or with some assistance from a group of accompanists” (1979, p. 34). This definition is reminiscent of great epics such as Homer’s *Illiad*, *The Odyssey* and Niane’s *Sundiata*. In fact, in the opening paragraph of *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, Bingo the griot equates Koyaga, the president

–dictator of the Republic du Golfe, to such great epic heroes as Ramses II and Sundiata. Singing the praises of his ‘hero’, Bingo the griot says: “Your name: Koyaga! Your totem; the falcon! Soldier and president ...You are a hunter. With Ramses II and Sundiata you are forever one of the three great hunters among men” (Kourouma, p.1).

The above words portray Koyaga as a merciless killer of both man and beasts. In just two sentences he is referred to as the falcon, a bird of prey; soldier, someone whose job is to kill people who have not necessarily wronged him or her; and a hunter, a killer of animals. Koyaga emerges as a person whose hands are full of blood. It is very interesting that Koyaga is compared to Sundiata, since according to panegyric epithets recited by Banna Kanube in Innes’ edition of *Sundiata*, people revolted against Sundiata because he was a war-monger. The griot sings: “He waged war against Manding nineteen times, /He rebuilt Manding nineteen times (1974, p. 237, line 2062-63).

This is an example of the great hero and king making war on his people just to safeguard his paramountcy. Even this reference, therefore, to Africa’s heroic past does not reflect well on Koyaga. Kourouma suggests that Africa’s pre-colonial past may have been filled with atrocities that are worse than those that characterize post-colonial African states. Pre-colonial African governance is thus shown not as a model of perfection that deserves glorification, but as very similar to the chaos of post-independent Africa. However, the irony of the above quotation also lies in that whatever dark side Sundiata may have had, he is still a hero worth of imitation, something that cannot be said of Koyaga, since he is roundly portrayed as a mere villainous impostor.

Even Koyaga’s hunting exploits, which are represented by his falcon totem, strike the reader as irrelevant in the modern era where animals are gunned down with automatic rifles fitted with sporting lances in game parks. The griot satirizes Koyaga’s hunting skills by showing that one does not need great skills as a hunter when carrying such a powerful weapon; the gun does it on its own. As will be seen later, the narrator shows that Koyaga is more a hunter of humans than of dangerous wild beasts. Koyaga is portrayed as a barbaric superstitious sadist through the way he kills and then

emasculates his real or imagined enemies. When in the last sentence of the first paragraph the griot appeals to the audience to “remember Koyaga, hunter and President-dictator of the Republic du Golfe”, he is therefore highlighting Koyaga’s mock-heroic status. Indeed the reader cannot forget Koyaga’s savage brutality.

Matthew Hodgart helps the reader to understand what Kourouma is trying to do in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* when he writes:

The satirist doesn’t paint an objective picture of the evils he describes, since pure realism would be too oppressive. Instead he offers us a travesty of the situation, which at once directs our attention to actuality and permits an escape from it. All good satire contains an element of aggressive attack and a fantastic vision of the world transformed: it’s written for entertainment, but contains sharp and telling comments on the problems of the world in which we live. (1969, p. 12)

The fantastical and magical elements that characterise *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* are Kourouma’s way of avoiding painting an objective picture of the evils he describes. But as will be shown, Kourouma’s method also involves the painting of horrific events in fine detail to the extent that his text reads like fantasy. Kourouma’s satire also allows the reader to vicariously experience the painful atrocities that he describes, but at the same time affords the reader a cathartic experience by his cold and detached ironic tone. The novel *Waiting for the Wild Beasts* is both brutal satire and a highly entertaining text.

In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* Kourouma emerges as a “a disillusioned moralist” (Brown and Kimmey, 1969, p. 83). Although Kourouma refuses to state his own moral standards openly, the reader constantly feels that he or she is being forced to create a moral standard against which to measure the strange forms of behaviour he portrays. In other words, the moral standards of a satirist exist in their absence. Discussing an idea related to this Martin Heidegger argues that “a boundary is not that which something stops but...is that at which something begins its presencing” (in Homi Bhabha 1994, p. 133). Applying this theory to Kourouma’s satiric presentation

of Koyaga, his real objectives begin where he stops. In other words the true objectives or moral standards of the satirist exist in their absence, in the boundary between what the satirist actually says and what he implies.

The epic structure that Kourouma adopts in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is characterized by a number of motifs. For example, praises have already been mentioned, and other motifs include the fantastic, predictions and dreams. Animals, marabouts, and diviners usually form an important part of an epic's characterization. Anny Wynchank notes that the material is usually borrowed from mythology, legends, panegyrics, laments and history. As has been seen already, myth and history form a large part of *Waiting for the Wild Beast to Vote*. In *Myth and Literature* William Righter argues: "Myth is narrative, irrational...and comes to mean any anonymously composed story telling of origins and destinies, the explanation a society offers its young to why the world is" (1975, p. 5). On the other hand, Rosemary Jackson in *Fantasy the Literature of Subversion* is of the opinion that "modern fantasy is rooted in ancient myth, mysticism, folklore, fairy tale and romance" (1981, p. 4).

Major satirical works such as Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Voltaire's *Candide*, and Orwell's *Animal Farm* contain large portions of the fantastic and mythological. While a large part of *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is based on the real material conditions of a people, it uses the fantastic and mythological as a vehicle through which it communicates its complex messages. Fantasy and myth therefore become important forms through which Kourouma's satire manifests itself in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*. Kourouma uses myth and fantasy as technical devices by which he transmutes the painful issues of real life. Hodgart argues that fantasy seems to be present in all true satire and that it is readily recognised by this quality of 'abstraction' (1969, p.12).

One of the most important tools of all literary artists is the way they handle language. For satirists, effective language use is a prerequisite since they do not only use it for its aesthetic purposes, but mainly as a weapon of attacking what they consider to be humanly unacceptable. The next chapter of this thesis examines in detail Kourouma's use of language in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*.

CHAPTER TWO

LANGUAGE, POWER AND SOCIETY

Christiane Ndiaye argues that “Kourouma effectively reverses the balance of power in his writing by resolutely ‘seizing control’ of the language which for so long served as one of the modes of foreign domination” (2007, p. 101). Jean-Marc Moura agrees with Ndiaye and further notes that Kourouma attains this power through subjecting the French language to subversion by the Malinke culture and language (2001, p. 505). Kourouma’s use of language in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* does indeed “transform him into a heroic fighter expertly handling his weapon” in order for him to expose and censure all forms of domination that prevent humanity from achieving its freedoms and find true fulfilment in life (Ndiaye, p. 101). *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is therefore characterized by this ambivalent awareness that language can be used as a double-edged sword; it can liberate, but it can also imprison the human spirit and potential.

The satiric griot-narrator in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* argues that fictional works enjoy power and privilege because they do not bother about the fine “distinction between truth and falsehood” (p. 225). He observes: “Who are these people we call great men? They are, without a doubt, those who best confabulate. Which birds are most beautiful? Those who have the most beautiful voices. The greatest works of literature in all humanity, in every civilization will always be fairy-tales, fictions” (p. 225). Since post-colonial African dictators and their erstwhile colonial European masters used and still use language for oppression and domination by blending truth and falsehood, Kourouma as a satirist also takes hold of the fictional language and uses it “to undermine all dominations, from the most insidious to the most obvious” (Ndiaye, p. 101).

Acknowledging that the power of Kourouma’s writing lies in the subversive nature of his writing, Matt Steinglass argues that *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*’s real genius is stylistic, because its language is thick with African idiom and oral tradition, and its use of language throws the postcolonial narrative into high relief (2006, p.1). This is an accurate observation: each of the six Vigils opens with at least three proverbs which indicate the main theme of that part of the *donsomana*, and all the

sections of the different Vigils close with at least three proverbs. Bingo indicates the importance of proverbs to the griot as a wordsmith when he says: “Tiécoura! Proverbs are the thoroughbreds of language; when words fail, it is through proverbs that we find them again” (Kourouma, p.41). This is true because in some parts of Africa when something that beats all logic and imagination happens, and people are left speechless, a proverb that sums up what has happened and what needs to be done usually comes in handy. The atrocious tale of Koyaga at times leaves the griot speechless, and it is at such times that proverbs become thoroughbreds of language, as Bingo points out. The novel is also filled with African sayings and verbal techniques in that Bingo’s presentation closely imitates the oral technique of addressing a live audience. For example, in the above quotation Bingo addresses his *koroduwa*, as the griotic custom of story-telling requires.

The novel sticks to the setting of a griotic tale that demands role-play and the participation of the audience at appropriate moments. For example, the apprentice griot, Koyaga, and Maclédio, Koyaga’s Minister of Orientation all participate in the ritualistic tale by commenting at various stages of the tale. This indicates that the griotic tale was never a closed past event, it was always a text in the making which was modified each time it was retold by the griot, and also by the participation of the audience. If the role of a historian is that of interpreting the past, the griot as a historian becomes a “time-binder”, a person who links the past and present and serves as a witness to the events in the present, which he or she may convey to persons living in the future (Hale, 1998, p. 23). Compared to the Western historian who spends years in libraries going through archival sources, the griot’s role as a historian is more dynamic and interactive, and certainly more lively and interesting. An examination of what Bingo and his *koroduwa* are doing in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* shows that as historians they are not merely retelling events, but they are reading the past for audiences in the present, making an interpretation that reflects a complex blend of both past and present values.

All writers manipulate words to produce a particular effect and control the readers’ attitudes, but it is in satire that the reader is always aware that the writer is deliberately manipulating words in order to persuade the reader to collude with him or her in his or her verbal battle. Alvin B. Kernan argues that it is in satire that the verbal

manipulation stands out and even deliberately calls attention to itself (1962, p. 179). Indeed, in order to fully appreciate Kourouma's *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, an examination of its use of language seems unavoidable. At this juncture, only a brief comparison of the griot and the satirist's reliance on verbal manipulation in order to achieve their aims will be attempted. Kourouma's stylistic devices and his use of language are so intense and diverse that a mere section of this work cannot adequately deal with them.

Thomas A. Hale calls griots professional artisans of the word and professional wordsmiths (1998, p. 126). In Africa praises can be sung by anyone and tales can be told by grandmothers sitting with grandchildren around an evening fire, but the fact that griots are professional artisans of the word makes their praises and tales different from those told by other general story-tellers. Unlike ordinary storytellers, griots are not only interested in the moral lesson of their tales, but they display a heightened sensitivity to differences stemming from birth, deed, or misfortune. Seen in this light, the tale of a griot reads like a Greek tragedy. As much as the Greek tragedian shows that Oedipus could not escape his fate of becoming king through killing his father and marrying his mother, the griot also shows that Koyaga could not avoid his destiny. For example, in the first Vigil Bingo makes it clear that everyone familiar with Koyaga's parentage and birth knew that he was not going to be an ordinary man. To start with, Koyaga is the son of Tchao, a great hunter and wrestler among the mountain people and the first man to bring Western civilisation to the mountain people. His mother, Nadjouma, was herself a great wrestler, "the unbeaten champion of [mountain] women" (Kourouma, p.40). In order to consummate his marriage through abduction, Tchao had to wrestle Nadjouma the whole afternoon. As a way of proving that Koyaga was the extraordinary child of two wrestling giants and professionals, Tiecoura comments with a mischievous smile: "Never, until the end of days, will grass grow again in the circle where the rape in which you, Koyaga, were begotten" (p. 41).

Similarly, Nadjouma's twelve months gestation period and her full week of labour pains all point to the fact that Koyaga belonged to the group of pathfinders, "those who hack a path through the morning brush, who clear the path, who pioneer" (Kourouma, p. 66). Bingo makes it clear that Koyaga was born to lead and to be a

master. As much as the Oracle of Delphi told Oedipus' parents of their inescapable fate, in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* it is the marabout Bokano Yacouba who spells out Koyaga's destiny. He tells the youthful Koyaga that "he belonged to the race of men who clear the paths, of men who are born to lead, of masters, those who must know when to stop, of those who must not fall-short nor go beyond their limit" (pp. 66, 67). Predicting even Koyaga's achievements and atrocities as a ruler, marabout Bokano exclaims to Nadjouma, Koyaga's mother:

Alas, the geomantic figures tell us that your son will go far and beyond. He will end greater, and therefore lesser; too happy, and therefore unhappy. He will be our pupil and our master, our wealth and our hardship, our joy and our grief ... exceptional! All that is sublime, beautiful and good and each of the opposites will be in this little one. (p. 67)

The cryptic and ironic words of the marabout raise a lot of questions about the power of the spoken word. J. G. A. Pocock argues that verbalising an action is powerful to the extent that it equals its performance. He further argues that "words [are] actions and [that they are] acts of power toward persons" (1984, p. 26). The speech of the marabout therefore raises a lot of questions about the power of verbalising wishes and intentions, the individual's freewill, and the extent to which humans are responsible for their actions and what happens to them. Of course, through the supernatural birth narratives of Koyaga, Kourouma may be saying that heroes are not born but produced through the tales of the griots or through the pens of historians. It is therefore the sensitivity to differences emanating from birth, deed and misfortune that sets the griot apart from general storytellers.

Throughout his narrative Bingo the griot shows both the power and the limitations of the spoken word. The power of the spoken word is illustrated by the speech of Nkoutigui Fondio (Guinea's Sekou Toure) at his inauguration as president of the newly independent Republic des Monts. His speech is so passionate that it makes Maclédio weep and abandon his studies in France, and go to the Republic des Monts in acceptance of Nkoutigui's call to all black intellectuals to join him in the building

of “the first truly independent state in West Africa and avenge the Emperor Samory”(p. 186). Reflecting on this incident the griot observes:

Ah, Tiécoura! In life a man may mistake the plate of food intended for him, but never the words intended for him. It was to Maclédio that Nkoutigui addressed himself. Macledio realised this at once. He was extremely moved and started to weep. He could do nothing but heed the call. (p. 187)

Of course the griot’s words are loaded with irony, because Nkoutigui later almost kills Maclédio by torture on the grounds of fabricated charges. Reflecting on this experience, Macledio comments: “Nkoutigui’s Republic des Monts was so foul that I have never met anyone who, having left the city had the slightest desire to return” (p. 203). This incident illustrates how political demagogues can take advantage of the power of words to achieve their evil ends.

As masters of the word, griots are always conscious of the limitations of language. The word can go so far, but it cannot capture the entire reality that is perceived by the speaker. The griot hints at these gaps that language does not fill when he fails to fully describe Nadjouma’s attributes. He says: “We *soras* have but words, and no words are sufficient to conjure the whole that is Nadjouma” (p. 39). This may be an admission that even the masters of the word are not masters all the time. These words may also be a reference to the griot’s lack of political power and social influence, for it is usually the word of those who are masters of the country that carries the day.

This great sensitivity to power structure and keen awareness of interpersonal relations are evident throughout Bingo’s narrative in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*. For example, in the section which describes Koyaga’s “Naked People” and their relationship with the French, Bingo shows great sensitivity to the power structure that regulated the interpersonal relations of the colonizer and the colonized. This is seen in Bingo’s use of the demeaning language of the colonizer in his description of the colonized. When Koyaga and the other boys from the mountains abandon school during the harmattan season in order to attend the dances, the initiatory combat and the hunts, Bingo says that the schoolmaster named de Souza, a descendant of the

emancipated Brazilian slaves, “decided to get rid of the disruptive, undisciplined little savages from the mountains” (Kourouma, p. 19). However, the narrator says that when Monsieur de Souza offered Koyaga’s expulsion papers to the white commissioner for him to sign he refused, pointing out that he likes mountain people, studies them and understands them. The narrator goes on to say that in the white commissioner’s “dealing with the Minister of Colonial Affairs he boasts that he is the only colonial administrator with a school capable of teaching the Paleos of the mountains how to read and write, the only one in the course of producing the first literate Naked Man” (Kourouma, p. 19).

The griot-narrator’s choice of words makes it clear that the French colonial administration had a condescending and patronizing attitude towards Koyaga and the rest of the Naked People. Koyaga and his mountain friends are kept at school for the self-gratification of the white administrator and are guinea pigs in the great French civilizing mission experiment. It becomes clear therefore that although the griot performs a variety of verbal social roles, the griot’s role above all, is an intensely political one. The griot is always speaking before live audiences of various sizes and Matthew Hodgart argues that “there is no escape from politics where more than a dozen people are living together” (1969, p. 33).

Similarly, “satire is primarily a political mode” (Plaff and Gibbs in Goodman 2000, p.34), and “satirists are acutely aware of the way language structures reality, and they are expert at exposing the tenuous quality of apparently fixed meaning” (Goodman, 2000, p.60). It is this shared interest in political issues by the griot and the satirist that probably led to Kourouma’s use of the griot-narrator in his political satire of African dictatorships. Admittedly, satire is unlikely to produce a huge social and political revolution, but it can allow an angry and frustrated society to give vent to its feelings in a harmless way by creatively giving it glimpses of an overwhelmingly savage human history.

Through his or her use of language the satirist “shocks us out of the anaesthetic grip our language maintains on our perceptions” (Terence Hawkes, 1977, p. 8). Usually, satirists succeed in shocking the reader out of the anaesthetic grip language maintains on his or her perceptions through the use of witticism, humour and irony in their

multiple forms. For example in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* the griot-narrator says that when Monsieur de Souza was forced to tolerate Koyaga's escapades and those of his classmates playing truant for a dozen weeks during the harmattan season, he "administered to their naked buttocks - before they had dressed once more – thirty lashes of the *chicote*, the mandatory punishment for natives who ran away" (p. 19). The choice of words here is ironically humorous. Koyaga's running away from school is called an "escapade", the administrator did not cane the boys but "administered" lashes on their naked buttocks, more like a nurse who administers medication through an injection on the bare buttocks of a patient, and these lashes were "mandatory punishment" specifically designed "for natives who ran away." To Koyaga and his fellow truant Naked Mountain classmates thirty lashes on the buttocks "seemed like delicate caresses" and therefore "did nothing to dissuade them: they did it again and again" (p. 19).

It is through this awareness of colonial jargon that the reader starts to perceive the authoritarian and dictatorial nature of the French colonial administration, which is the subject of the narrator's satire here. This allows the reader to fully appreciate the heavy and condemnatory satire embedded in the narrator's comment that the school administrator went around boasting about his love and knowledge of the mountain people. The narrator shows that the colonial jargon of the French administrators defined their world-view and led them to see only the positive aspects of their rule, and that it blinded them to the cruel realities of their inflexible and paternalistic colonial administration. In this way, the satirist shows that language is a multi-edged weapon that can both liberate and imprison people's perceptions.

While French colonial terminology prevented them from seeing the serious abuses of human rights that their administration was involved in, the satirist now uses the same language as a tool for liberation by exposing the contradictions that characterised their colonial administration. Linda Hitchon concurs with this view when she argues: "Language paradoxically expresses and oppresses, educates and manipulates" (in Smyth 1991, p. 121). That is why the satirist and the griot, who can rightly be called professional artisans of the word, can have a huge influence over their communities.

However, Kourouma is not only satirising the French colonial administration for its cruel and myopic world-view, but his satire reaches all the way to the rigid world-view of Koyaga and his fellow mountain people. The narrator points out that Koyaga and his fellow mountain boys endured thirty lashes on their naked buttocks every year at the end of the *harmattan* season because “the *harmattan* meant combat, dancing and hunting in the mountains [and that] a true Naked Man could not bear to spend the *harmattan* far away from the mountains” (p. 18). The reasons for Koyaga’s abandoning school show the power that some cultural linguistic aspects of a society can have on the individual’s perception of the world. The mere mention of the words combat, dancing and hunting is enough to make a mountain person endure a lot of physical pain just to be part and parcel of this ritualistic cultural custom. What intensifies the satire of Koyaga’s actions is the fact that before his father’s cruel death in a French colonial prison, he had told him that there was no way they could successfully resist French political and cultural colonialism. Tchao’s farewell words to his son before his death were: “We cannot enter this world unless we clothe ourselves, unless we abandon our nakedness” (p. 14). It is ironic that Tchao was more visionary than his Would-be-President son, who seems to be resisting the inevitable.

Writing to the Hebrew Christians in the first century about what he believed to be God’s written word, the apostle Paul argued: “For the word of God is alive and exerts power and is sharper than any two edged sword and pierces even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow and discerns thoughts and intentions of the heart” (The Holy Bible, Hebrews 4: 12). For Paul the word of God is alive and has the power to make an individual reflect on his actions and conduct. What is interesting is that he sees it as a weapon not for social reform but of personal reform, for this is the same view that both satirists and griots hold about their verbal prowess. For example, in Cheik Ndao’s play, speaking to one of the characters, the griot says: “Samba will loan you his tongue which will plunge into the hearts of men in spite of themselves” (in Hale 1996, pp. 77, 78). The griot is here implying that his well-thought and carefully chosen words have an overpowering effect on people’s emotions and attitudes. This view of language is similar to the Foucauldian assumption that power works in part through discourse and that it works in part to produce and destabilise subjects (Foucault, 1986, p. 93). Judith Butler is also of the opinion that there is an

aspect of discourse that she calls performativity that has the capacity to produce what it names (1994, p. 33).

It is in the light of the above views that Goodman's argument that "language is satire's tool for the manufacture of alternative worlds" should be understood (2000, p. 135). Goodman is referring to satire's emphasis on the existence of stupidity, hypocrisy and evil and how satire offers resistance to these aspects of existence when language is used to satirise them. In E. L Doctorow's view, the word, whether written or spoken "can affect consciousness – affect the way people think and therefore the way they act" (in Smyth, E. J 1991, p. 43). The fact that both the words of the griot and those of the satirist do affect people's consciousness and thinking is indisputable. Surely this effect can also lead individuals to some new kind of self-recognition. But whether the satirist's or the griot's words can lead to fundamental social, political and economic changes in society remains a debatable issue.

Thomas Hale's argument that griots are masters of the spoken word is very interesting, especially when one considers that *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is narrated by a satiric griot-narrator. The next chapter of this thesis makes a comparative examination of the griotic and satiric methods in Kourouma's satirization of post-colonial African forms of leadership.

CHAPTER THREE

THE GRIOT, SATIRE, MORALITY AND HISTORY

This section of the thesis is going to examine the extent to which griotic methods are similar to the satirical methods in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*. This approach encourages a broader examination of aesthetic, cultural and social issues addressed by reference to and imitation or satirizing of the structures of oral genres. That the structure and form of *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is derived from the African oral tradition is an incontestable issue. It is with this understanding that this thesis will examine the extent to which the oral structure that *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* adopts holds the key to imaginative ways of viewing political issues.

As has already been pointed out above, *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is structured as an epic. *The American Heritage Dictionary* (1971) defines a griot as “a West African poet, praise singer, and wandering musician, considered [to be] a repository of oral tradition”. According to this definition, the griot is an artistic composer, an entertainer and a historian. In order to entertain, the griot wove a people’s history into an artistic rendition. Tom Hale in *Griots and Griottes* calls griots masters of words and music (Hale 1998, p. 335). Hale points out that among the many roles that griots performed they were also “historians, genealogists, advisers to the nobility, entertainers, messengers [and] praise singers” (1998, p. 19).

The mock-epic of Koyaga in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is recited by Bingo the griot, who does not only rely on traditional griotic methods but also subverts them for satirical purposes. The fact that Hale calls griots masters of words makes them very similar to satirists, who have also been viewed as masters of words. Hale further points out that griots are both feared and respected by the people in West Africa for their wisdom and talent with words. They can sing one’s praises, but they can also sing one’s doom (Hale, 1998, p. 335). The satirist, on the other hand, often uses his words as a weapon with which to attack what is evil and absurd. This explains why “satirists have been the most persecuted of artists - exiled, silenced, sued [and] physically attacked” (P. K Elkin in Goodman 2000, p. 29). Most satirists operate from the fringes of their society in order to be better able to see more clearly the excesses

of their respective societies. The evidence that will be examined in this thesis shows that the griot, despite being traditionally viewed as a repository of his or her people's history and legends, also operated from the fringes of his society. For a start, griot training was very rigorous. Hale describes their training as comparable to that of attaining a doctoral degree. This long training obviously alienated the griots from their own society. In addition, a good griot had to have an exceptional memory, which would enable him or her to recite or sing long histories and genealogies, including the accompanying music. So both the griot and the satirist have an ambivalent relationship with their societies.

Viewing the griot as both an artist and a chronicler of historical and legendary events has important implications for the reading of *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, since this novel can be read as both an epic and a satirical text. Some critics such as Leonard Feinberg in *The Satirist His Temperament, Motivation, and Influence*, "reject the concept that the creative impulse which motivates other writers is the same force that motivates the satirist" (1963, p. 3). Morality, and not aesthetic concerns, has often been seen as the main motivation of satirical writers. Ellen Douglass Leyburn argues that "no other kind of writing is more frankly, sometimes blatantly, didactic than satire" (1956, p. 13). Due to this perceived didacticism of satire and the fact that the satirist always combines earnest with jest in his or her art, he or she has often been seen as a lesser artist than other artists who seem to pursue "art for art's sake".

It is interesting, however, to note that the griot also shares the satirist's interest in morals. According to Leonard Feinberg, however, the commitment of the satirist to morality is nothing peculiar because "morality is a significant characteristic of every literary form" (1963, p. 27). It has often been argued that there is no human being without views about moral values because to be human is to have certain ethics and principles. For satirists and griots therefore, as in the case of all other artists, it is a matter of whether or not their moral judgements are covertly or overtly stated, since all literature contains some moral views. It is important, of course, to realize that societies rarely agree on the precise definition of what is moral and what is not. But despite the relativity of the definition of the term "morality", most satirists and griots, as it is evident in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* and many other satirical works, are opposed to what they perceive as "evil".

One of the major contentions of this thesis will be that most of the satirist's methods are very similar to those of the West African griot or any African praise singer for that matter. It is important to compare the griotic and satiric methods in order to see the close similarities of these two arts. The similarity of the griotic methods and satiric methods explains why Kourouma chose the mock epic structure in his satirization of some of the worst excesses of African post-colonial dictatorships. In addition to the satirical structure of a mock epic, an epic in West Africa is recited by a griot. Bingo, in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, calls himself "the griot, the poet and the chronicler, [and] the musician of Koyaga's Brotherhood of Hunters" (Kourouma, p.2). It is interesting to note that Bingo views himself as a poet thereby foregrounding his role as an artist. Bingo also calls himself a chronicler and musician, and these two titles show that a griot was both a repository of a people's history and tradition, and also an entertainer. Were Were, one of the characters in the novel *A Change of Tongue* by Antjie Krog, has the following unkind words for griots: "The griots help to sustain the oppression. They are used by the despots to keep everybody subservient. They escape into the abstraction of language. The word 'word' becomes a metaphor, the word 'hunger' an image" (2003, p. 305).

This quotation raises a lot of issues about the role of the griot, both in pre-colonial African states and in post-independent African nations. Were Were is arguing that the griot enjoys a lot of benefits because of the patronage of the politically powerful. As the saying goes, a master's dog is a master when the master is away. The griot also enjoys a lot of material benefits that drop off from his master's table. Joanna Lott points out that although the griot did not set a fee for his or her services, he or she sometimes received a lot of gifts. For example, in one reported case, a wealthy admirer gave the Malian griotte Kandia Kouyate a small airplane so that she could fly directly to his airstrip whenever he wanted to hear his praises sung (Joanna Lott 2002, p. 2). For the material benefits that may accrue, the griot may shower his or her patron with undeserved praise. The satirist, on the other hand, does not have patrons but objects of attack, and rarely sets himself the task of praising his victims for material gain. Most satirists are motivated by their wish to stigmatize crime or ridicule folly, and wish to aid in diminishing or removing it. Satire can therefore be seen as aiming at amending vice by correcting it. Even though some satiric works do not fit into the

above description Kourouma, in an interview with Stephen Gray (2001, p.1), has alluded to this motive. However, both the satirist and the griot seem to share the aesthetic motive and they are motivated by “the pleasure which all artists and writers feel in making their own special pattern, manipulating his chosen material” (Highet 1962, p. 242).

Nonetheless, the griot’s obsession with praise and words can be viewed positively. The griot is an artist who has to earn his or her living and therefore has to be careful that he or she does not bite the hand that feeds him or her. This also explains why the satirist needs a lively flow of humour, combined with a strong serious point of view, and a taste good enough to allow him or her to say shocking things without making the reader turn away in disdain. No matter how angry the satirist is about something, he or she cannot afford to write hate literature. He or she has to contrive a way to justify and generalize that anger in order to make his or her reader share in it.

Griots and the satirists are not only similar in their artistic methods, they are also similar in their social functions. Both griots and satirists have a particular involvement and commitment to their respective communities. The social roles of the griots make them more physically involved with their communities; while the satirists’ involvement with their communities is also deep, it tends to be at an emotional level rather than physical level. Hale lists the social functions of the griots as “recounting history, providing advice, serving as spokespersons, representing the ruler as a diplomat, mediating in conflicts, interpreting the words of others into different languages, playing music, composing songs and tunes, teaching students, exhorting participants in wars and sports, reporting news, overseeing, witnessing or contributing to important life ceremonies, and praise-singing” (1998, p. 19). The griot had to be a highly talented and versatile person in order to perform all his or her social roles effectively. These social functions required the use of different artistic methods for their satisfactory performance.

Just like griots, satirists are wilful and independent people who may adopt a number of social roles and a variety of methods in order to achieve their goals. Gilbert Highet catalogues the satirical methods as follows: “variety, down-to-earth unsophistication, coarseness, an improvisatory tone, humour, mimicry, echoes of the speaking voice,

abusive gibing, and a general feeling, real or assumed, of devil-may-care nonchalance” (1962, p. 233). From a functional point of view, the social roles of the griots seem to contribute to a “portrait of an extremely dynamic profession that enables societies to cohere” (Hale, p. 19). On the other hand, satiric methods outwardly portray satirists as sharp-tongued, hot-tempered, disillusioned and socially destructive individuals. This thesis will argue that these differences are only superficial, because both the griot and the satirist are committed idealists. The griot is an overt idealist while the satirist is a covert idealist. The physical social involvement of the griot in the day-to-day activities of his or her society portrays him or her as someone who wants his or her society to become a better place. The satirist, on the other hand, bitterly criticises his or her society because he or she is a secret idealist: he or she too would be glad to create a better society if he or she had the power to do so.

It has already been noted that one of the many similarities between the griot and the satirist is their obsession with the word, whether spoken or written. Both the satirist and the griot are interested in the manipulation of words to make them mean what they want them to mean. What Were Were calls the griot’s escape into the abstraction of language matches the prevalent use of irony by satirists, and it also fits into the satirist’s weakness for humour. Both the satirist and griot’s play on words is often humorous and entertaining. Highet argues that satirists are motivated by “the pleasure which all artists and writers feel in making their own special pattern, manipulating their chosen material” (1962, p. 233). What makes the patterns of satire interesting is that they are complicated, and most accomplished satirists are highly talented individuals. They have a huge vocabulary, lively sense of humour, a strong serious point of view and a powerful imagination that is significantly ahead of their readers.

Similarly, the various roles of the griot required him or her to have a highly creative mind, an extraordinary memory, a huge vocabulary and an undying sense of humour. In his or her narrative the griot could hold an audience spellbound for several hours. That is why the griot’s history was a multi-generic narrative that included genealogies, praise songs, etymologies, incantations, oaths, and proverbs (Johnson 1986, p. 57). These multiple functions of the griot are dramatized in Kourouma’s highly satirical novel *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*. In this novel, Bingo the

griot narrates Koyaga's epic, albeit a mock-epic. He therefore assumes the role of a poet or bard and becomes the repository of oral tradition in history and literature. This is clearly seen from the fact that a lot of material in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is based on historical fact. For example, the reference to the colonization of Africa and the Berlin Conference of 1884 in the first Vigil, Section One, is well-known to students of history. Even the character of Koyaga is based on that of the late Togolese dictator Eyadema. In an interview with Stephen Gray in 2001, Ahmadou Kourouma had the following to say about *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* and the character of Koyaga:

It's really a satire on dictatorships, and my particular dictator is ... President Eyadema of Togo. When he is asked if he might lose a certain election, he replies [that] there's no possibility whatsoever because, even if he did lose, by magic he'd call all the wild animals of the bush, and all of them would vote for him unanimously. (Gray, 2001, p. 1)

It is clear, therefore, that the art of both the griot and the satirist relies heavily on the use of historical narratives. In West African traditional societies the griot was viewed as the human link between the past and the present, and the griot depended on the use of genealogy to establish his credentials before the audience. That is why Bingo, at the beginning of his tale, emphasizes his own genealogy and his clan's link to Koyaga's Brotherhood of hunters. A good knowledge, therefore, of genealogy and clan relations was an essential component of any griot's historical baggage if the griot was to advance beyond a back-up role in a chorus of singers. Hale argues that "the recounting of someone's genealogy in the course of the ceremony or in the narration of an epic constitutes not only the recreation of the past but also a legitimization of those in the present, including the griot" (1998, p. 22). That is why in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* Bingo, the griot narrator, digresses so much into the narration of other characters' past, including that of Bokano Yacouba the marabout, and Maclélio, Koyaga's Minister of Orientation. The griot was therefore a human library, and it is in the light of this that Joanna Lotts argues that "societies in the Sahel and Savannah regions in West Africa have long kept their own history, in their own languages, orally in the form of epics" (2002, p. 1). That is why the senior griot always had an

apprentice; it was to ensure that in the event of the senior griot's untimely death the people's memory would not perish with his demise.

It is important, however, to note that the methods of a Western-trained historian differ from those of a West African griot. In the historical narrative of the griot there is no separation of epic, saga, and legend from what may be termed real historical fact. In their historical narratives, griots provide deep insights into the values of a people and their social structure. The text of the griot is less a representation of the past than a contemporary reading of that past (Johnson, 1989, p. 18). This, however, does not make the griot's role as an historian any less than that of his Western counterpart who uses dates and written documents. In order to appreciate the griot's role as an historian one has to take a culturally relative view of history.

The satirist's use of history also constitutes a contemporary reading of the past rather than its accurate representation. This view is supported by *The Complete Review* which argues that "much of *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is based on fact, but Kourouma presents it in a radically transformed way...[and] many of the events and the figures are easily recognizable from the recent past – [and] indeed, because many of [Kourouma's] readers lived through the times and events described [in the novel] – it is the more effective in conveying the outlandishness and outrageousness of the recent history" (2007, p. 4). It is clear therefore that the satirist, like the griot, uses his thorough knowledge of historical facts to legitimize his role as a social critic of folly and evil.

Leyburn argues that in satire "there is always a judgement of faults and there is always some sort of indirection in the conveying of the judgement, whether concealment is laughter or some sterner sort of rhetorical intensification" (1978, p. 7). The satirical method of indirection mentioned here by Leyburn is very much similar to one of the griot's techniques of story telling. Dorothy S. Blair argues that "the griot would never go straight to the point ... he must proceed by digressions" (1985, p. xii). In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* Bingo seems to utilize both the griotic method of digression mentioned above by Blair and the satirical method of indirection referred to by Leyburn, in conveying his judgement on Koyaga and other African dictators. Tiécoura, on the other hand, taking full advantage of the traditional modus

operandi of an apprentice griot, goes to the extreme and tells things without any embellishment. He adopts what Gilbert Highet calls a “devil-may-care nonchalance”. Tiécoura also uses other satirical methods such as humour and abusive gibing mentioned by Highet. This is very similar to the satirical method of intensification, where the satirist focuses with cold detachment on the ugly and degraded aspects of human nature. Tiécoura’s method of exposing folly and evil is therefore very much in keeping with both satirical methods and griotic methods. The satirist may indeed be very direct and scathing in his or her criticism of what he or she considers as evil. As Gilbert Highet points out above, the satirist has a bag full of satirical methods.

However, some differences between the methods of the satirist and the griot do exist, and some of them are as a result of the nature of their audience and the method by which they present their message. In the past, the audience of the griot was always present and he or she could measure the effect of his or her words by the audience’s response. The satirist who writes his or her satire on the other hand, does not have a live audience, and therefore cannot measure the effect of his or her criticism by the audience’s immediate response. The criticisms of the satirist therefore tend to be more concentrated and focused than those of a griot.

The West African griot also seems to have been disadvantaged by the fact that he or she had to perform a double role, a delicate balancing act. Harriet D. Lyons notes that “the griot sang praises of their noble patrons and also attempted to defend them from accusations by others. Conversely, they had the right to speak out and rebuke their superiors’ misdeeds” (1985, p. 319). Probably this is the reason why Were Were in *A Change of Tongue* says that griots help to sustain oppression and that they are used by despots to keep everyone subservient. Hale (1998) also points out that in his or her role as a spokesperson the griot accumulated a lot of power. In many cases the griot spoke for the ruler as Bingo is seen doing in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, but he or she also spoke for those who came to him or her for redress or other matters. The spokesperson role obviously increased the social status of the griot. Lilyan Kesteloot offers examples of the power stemming from this special role and then points out that griots were instruments of power, but that they also influenced the way it was exercised (in Hale 1998, p. 21). Although there have been satirists who occupied socially influential positions very few satirists, if any, have ever tried to be

spokespersons for powerful rulers. Most satirists align themselves with the powerless and appoint themselves as their spokespersons.

Bingo, in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, is very much aware of the duality of his role. He says that one of his roles is to pay tribute and relate the stories of the hunters in order to spur them to greater heroic feats (p. 2). Tiécoura, his *koroduwa* (an apprentice griot) on the other hand, “can do as he wishes [and] everything is permitted him, nothing that he does goes unpardoned” (p. 2). Bingo actually urges Tiécoura to “add his pinch of salt.” When added as seasoning to a meal, salt makes food taste better. But when it is put on an open wound as a kind of medication, it can cause a lot of painful discomfort. Bingo probably uses the word with both meanings in mind. As the evidence will show, Tiécoura’s words are not at all like salt as a seasoning agent, rather like salt on a raw and open wound. His criticism of Koyaga’s abuse of power is direct and scathing and his role is more like that of a western satirist. Koyaga and his friends accept Tiécoura’s insults because they hope to attain ritual purification from the whole process. Bingo actually calls his mock epic a “purification tale”. Commenting on why a ruler would submit to the apparent insults of the griot, Lyons says that it was believed that the accusations of the griots “could lead to purification from sin, particularly violations of sexual restrictions and abuses of privilege, though they were of a despised caste, forbidden to marry with the free-born. Purification could thus be attained through submitting to verbal abuse from the lowly” (1956, p. 324). Lyons’ words help the reader to understand why Bingo calls his story a purification tale.

In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, Koyaga’s violations include the violation of sexual restrictions. For example, there is the overt allusion to an incestuous relationship between Koyaga and his mother. Bingo says: “The relationship between you, Koyaga, and your mother is too close. You are accused of incest ... She often sits on your lap, or you on hers. Very often you sleep on your mother’s bed ...” (p. 345). Koyaga also abuses his power and privilege. The most diabolic instance of this is the merciless murder of his suspected enemies, and then cutting off their genitals and stuffing them into their mouths for ritual purposes. One of the dictators that Koyaga emulates even has sexual intercourse with the wives of his victims on the same night that their husbands are murdered. This is a ritual meant to stave off the avenging

spirits of his victims. Because of Koyaga's many sexual violations, Tiécoura mischievously gives him the epithet of "dedicated chaser of other people's wives, of citizens' wives" (Kourouma, p. 329).

Wyndham Lewis also refers to the ambivalent role of the satirist when he contends that, "although satire is moral and an expression of the desire to reform, it is also frequently amoral and an expression of an aesthetic drive" (in Feinburg 1963, p. 6). By saying that satire is moral and the satirist seemingly harbours some covert desire to reform, Lewis is focusing on the major and indispensable method of "unmasking" or exposing that characterises most satirical works (Edgar Johnson in Feinburg 1963, p. 6). The technique of unmasking is closely related to that of playful critical distortion of the familiar on which most satirists also heavily rely on. Bingo and his apprentice Tiécoura are presented as both serious moralizers and as playful distorters of what is familiar. This seems to be one of the numerous zones of convergence between griotic methods and satiric methods.

Tiécoura indirectly refers to the satirical method of unmasking or exposing when he says that they will tell the whole truth about Koyaga's dirty tricks, bullshit, lies, many crimes and assassinations (Kourouma, p. 2). Some critics have argued that morality is the basic motivation of satire. G. K. Chesterton, for example, is of the opinion that "the purpose of satire is to make the victim change his behaviour" (in Leonard Feinberg 1963, p. 20). This also seems to be the unstated motive of the satirical comments of both Bingo and Tiécoura in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*. Other critics have claimed that the satirist is motivated by hatred of wrong and injustice as much as the love of the right and the just. For example, Bredvold regards the satirist as a noble moralist who "complains not on his own account but for the sake of humanity, and that his indignation is altruistic rather selfish" (1963, p. 21). Lilyan Kesteloot points out that in West Africa the griot was a spokesperson. She claims that as spokespersons, griots accumulated a lot of power and that they derived this power from the fact that they spoke for both the ruler and for those who came to him for redress or other matters (1991, p. 20). The roles of the griot and the satirist therefore seem to intersect again in their concern for justice and morality.

It has already been noted that Bingo calls his narrative a tale of purification that is supposed to lead to catharsis or a fresh start for the nation. It has also been pointed out that Harriet D. Lyons argues that the noble patron of the griot attained purification through submitting to verbal abuse from the lowly griot, who was usually of slave birth. Hale says that in West Africa “the words of the griot contain a mystical and transcendent power [and that] the hortatory speech of griots is endowed with considerable power to move people in ways that may surprise them” (1998, p. 44). In the light of this, Koyaga’s listening patiently to the ‘whole truth’ about his atrocious rule functions as a confession, which in some religions is viewed as bringing about spiritual and psychological relief to the penitent individual. Having thus been spiritually and psychologically cleansed, the individual can think much more clearly and focus on solving his or her problems. This seems to be the purpose of Koyaga’s *donsomana* or tale of purification.

On the other hand, Ahmadou Kourouma may be seen as the new griot, and as such, Kourouma the novelist is exposing the society’s misdeeds in the hope of effecting purification. Griots had to be men and woman of integrity. The griot Mamadou Kouyate, principal source of *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali*, says: “My word is pure and free of all untruth; it is the word of my father; it is the word of my father’s father ... royal griots do not know how to lie” (Niane, 1965, p. 1). The actual griots in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, Bingo and Tiécoura, are implicated in Koyaga’s crimes. To start off with, they make a living out of the patronage of Koyaga, whose *donsomana* they are obviously singing for a livelihood. Secondly, Bingo says that his task is to relate “stories of the hunters to spur [them on] ... to greater feats” (p. 2). By depicting the griot in this way, Kourouma is making a satirical attack on the traditional role of the griot. Despite his criticism of his patron’s abuse of power and other violations, the griot is depicted as a partner in crime with his master. It is therefore doubtful whether the griot really hopes “to make his victim improve his behaviour” as a result of his criticism, as G. K Chesterton argues in the case of the satirist, or whether he is just engaged in harmless mischief.

There seems to be a parallel here between the objectives of the griot and the satirist. Rather than hoping to bring about the reform of their victims, the griot’s criticism and the satirist’s verbal attacks seem aimed at bringing about spiritual and psychological

relief at the individual level, and at the social level, to restore social equilibrium, which a community seems to lose from time to time in its struggle for survival. The loss of social equilibrium in the mythical République du Golfe leads to greed, corruption and lust, which in turn lead to political, social and economic instability. The griot, as the ruler's advisor, carefully frames his or her criticism in praises that reveal both a personal and a collective link between the subject and those who are inescapably bound to him or her for political and social reasons. It is in the light of the foregoing that Hale argues that, on one level, the griots may appear to be seeking rewards for themselves, but in a deeper sense they speak for society when they remind the ruler of his responsibility (1998, p. 29). Unlike the satirist, who for most of the time lacks any political connections and influence, a ruler's griot enjoyed considerable social status because he was viewed as a courtier. This explains why the ruler's griot could not be scathingly critical of his or her patron.

Both the satirist and the griot can therefore be referred to as men who joke about serious things. The griot and the satirist's "truth" is always coated with humour, but this humour does not always lead to hearty laughter. Referring to the socially ambivalent role of the satirist, and by implication that of the griot, E. M Forster notes that the satirist "is neither a poet nor a preacher, but a fellow with a camera a few yards away" (1963, p. 26). A fellow with a camera a few yards away often catches people during awkward moments and poses, and preserves those moments or poses as a permanent record that the victim cannot change or deny. The satirist usually does this in a semi-playful spirit. This thesis will argue that it is from this semi-playful spirit that satire derives its aesthetic and ideological force. Sory Camara notes that griots also do something similar to that done by satirists. He argues that griots have the advantage of maintaining joking relationships with all members of society (in Hale, 1998, p. 229). For example, Tiécoura, Bingo's apprentice griot in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, makes it clear that he is not a stern moralizer. Both the griot and the satirist adopt a playful tone in their criticism because they lack any real power. Most satirists are outsiders in their societies, as has already been noted, and lack any significant political influence or power. Despite the respect that the people have for the griot's mastery of words and the fear of doom he may utter against them the griot, as has already been seen, was a social misfit, not only because he was usually of slave birth, but also because he made a living from his patron-victims.

It is important to note that in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* Bingo and Tiécoura occupy different social roles. Bingo's role is more in keeping with a respectable courtier and historian-advisor, while Tiécoura occupies the role of a court jester. He "trills his flute, jiggles and dances" (p. 2). In traditional West African societies it is the apprentice griot, therefore, who is likely to be viewed as a more forceful critic. In the light of the many roles that griots played in most West African societies, the attack on the griots by one of Antjie Krog's characters in *A Change of Tongue*, who says that griots help to sustain oppression, and that they are used by despots to keep everybody subservient through their escape into the abstraction of language, seems to be an overly harsh generalization. By playing "the fool, the idiot, the loon", Tiécoura is acting within the cultural expectations of an apprentice griot (Kourouma, p. 2).

It is interesting to note that in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, although Bingo and Tiécoura are depicted as concerned and devoted moralists, they seem to enjoy their roles as griot and apprentice griot, respectively. This can be explained by the fact that the griot and the satirist are not just angry moralizers, they are also artists. James Thurber argues: "You have to enjoy humorous writing while you are doing it. You have to enjoy it. You can't be mad, or bitter or irate" (1945, p. 32). According to this view, therefore, it is the sheer joy of being a literary creator which saves both satire and griotic speeches from being mere moralizing texts of angry and disillusioned individuals. This explains why, no matter how grim the subject of satire is, and that of the griot, it is always laced with what can be called satiric or griotic humour, respectively. This is humour which is neither funny nor sad, but the humour of every artist, the humour of knowing that one is a 'creator' of a text.

Despite the obvious undercurrent of humour that characterizes most of *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, it is clear that Kourouma did not intend to write harmless comedy. His ferocious focus on the bodily grotesque suggests that he is very angry about post-colonial Africa's state of affairs. Chapter four examines Kourouma's use of the images of bodily life through Bakhtin's theory of "the grotesque body".

CHAPTER FOUR

SATIRE, THE GROTESQUE, THE BODILY, AND POWER

Mikhail Bakhtin argues that “the grotesque is always satire [and that satire is] a negation of the entire order of life (including the prevailing truth), a negation closely linked to affirmation of that which is born new” (1984, p.306). It is interesting to note that in the above quotation Bakhtin sees satire as a genre that cannot be divorced from the grotesque and that satire has both destructive and regenerative powers. If the grotesque is defined as something hideously ugly, wild and extravagant in form which uses extreme exaggeration in its criticism of humans’ ‘inhumanity’, Kourouma’s *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* can indeed be read as both a grotesque realist and highly satiric text.

Philip Thomson argues that “a grotesque scene conveys the notion of [something] simultaneously laughable and horrifying or disgusting” (1972, p.3). As will be argued in this chapter, Kourouma calculatingly employs laughter and horror for satirical purposes in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*. Kourouma’s work suggests that he views satire and the grotesque in the same light as Bakhtin and Thomson do. For example, early in the novel Kourouma indicates that his *donsomana* is a purification tale: it involves the pulling down and destruction of all human facades and pretence to grandeur, with the aim of bringing about catharsis. Bakhtin, as has already been noted above, sees satire and the grotesque as the reversal of the entire order of life which leads to regeneration. In this thesis, the term grotesque realism will be used to refer to the artistic representation of what are considered as the “ugly” or the “real” aspects of life, as opposed to those considered as beautiful and ideal. This chapter will apply Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque and grotesque realism to a reading of Kourouma’s satire of post-colonial African governance in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*.

In *Rabelais and His World*, where Bakhtin analyses the work of the sixteenth-century French writer Francois Rabelais, he argues that both the carnivalesque and grotesque

realism have social functions. Bakhtin argues that Renaissance carnivals were “ritual based on laughter. They offered a completely different, non-official, extra-ecclesiastical and extra-political aspect of the world of man and human relations; they built a second life after officialdom” (pp. 5-6). The laughter of the carnival ritual derived its strength from what Bakhtin calls the “grotesque body”, and this aspect is a key element in his theory of the carnivalesque and grotesque realism. He writes: “[T]he essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus. These two areas play the leading role in the grotesque image, and it is precisely for this reason they are predominantly subject to positive exaggeration, to hyperbolization” (1984, p.317). Kourouma’s *donsomana*, in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, is also a ritual based on laughter that derives from the grotesque body. The griot and his respondent, the *koroduwa*, ensure that the atmosphere of the *donsomana* is gay and a carnival spirit permeates the whole setting. This is especially evident at the end of each section of the Vigil, where the *sora* and the *koroduwa* offer a musical and dancing performance before the audience. What happens at the end of Section One in the First Vigil illustrates this issue. The narrator says: “‘From time to time in any tale, one must pause to take a breath, we will pause here’ announces the *sora*. Then he sings accompanied by the *cora*, while the responder performs a frenzied dance lasting five minutes, and then stops. He takes up the air again, this time on a flute. The *sora* asks him to cease and intones proverbs concerning tradition” (p.15).

The description of Tiécoura’s performances at the end of the First Vigil and the beginning of the Second Vigil suggests that the *donsomana* is about the grotesque, and the bodily. The narrator says: “Tiécoura the *koroduwa* begins by accompanying [Bingo the *sora*]. Suddenly as though stung by a bee, he screams, swears and gives himself over alternatively to the dances of huntsman and to obscene gestures” (p. 68). The same trend can be seen when the *sora* performs the musical prelude to mark the beginning of the Second Vigil where the “*koroduwa* gets carried away in obscene and grotesque jeers” and the *sora* has to tell him to “cease [his] shameful gestures” (p. 69).

The singing, the use of different musical instruments such as the cora and the flute, the responder's "frenzied dance", and even the recitation of proverbs which evoke absurd and comic imagery, all create a relatively gay atmosphere for the *donsomana* ritual. All this indicates that the *donsomana* is nothing similar to complete, polished and serious official functions where the obscene and the grotesque have no place. As has already been argued, the *koroduwa*'s performances, the grotesque jeers and the obscene gestures are not just entertainment but can be interpreted as symbolic of what Bakhtin terms the undisciplined bodies of the folk. In the undisciplined bodies of the folk Bakhtin sees the greatest potential for social and ideological upheaval. He even suggests that the established state order can be destabilized and reorganized by desacralizing the well-disciplined, law-abiding, state sanctioned individual body, and revaluing the grotesque materiality of defecating, farting, reproducing, dying, living bodies (Jasmine Rault, 2000, p.4). This suggests that, as in Bakhtin's carnivals, the *donsomana*, although apparently sanctioned by President Koyaga, offers a completely different, non-official, extra-ecclesiastical and extra-political aspect of man, and of human relations, since it appears to be building a second life outside officialdom. Of course some critics such as Terry Eagleton (1981) have accused Bakhtin of being overly optimistic about the revolutionary capacity of the carnival spirit, and this accusation is not without some merit. Achille Mbembe argues that Bakhtin's error was to attribute the use of obscenity as a tool of inversion only to the dominated. He writes:

The production of burlesques is not specific to this group. The real inversion takes place when, in their desire for a certain majesty, the masses join in the madness and clothe themselves in cheap imitations of power to reproduce its epistemology, and when power, in its own violent quest for grandeur, makes vulgarity and wrong doing its main mode of existence (2001, p. 133).

In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* Kourouma seems to be in search of a new mode of expressing the grotesque and the irrationality of power by developing narrative perspectives and devices that include the surreal, excessive exaggeration, and the dismembered body. On numerous occasions, the coherent griotic narration

dissolves into the fragmented view of multiple narrative subjects, while time and space lose their shape in the realm of dream, nightmare and fantasy. When the novel opens, the narrative voice can clearly be identified as that of Bingo the griot, addressing either Tiécoura his responder, Koyaga the dictator president, or Maclédio, Koyaga's Minister of Orientation. Using the first person narrative voice Bingo says: "I will tell the tale of purification" (p. 2). However, this coherent narrative voice quickly dissolves into the fragmented view of many narrators. On other occasions, *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* operates in the realm of magical realism. The narratives where Koyaga fights mythical beasts and shape-shifts into beasts and birds are good examples of the fantastic elements of the novel. Maclédio's birth, childhood and his long search for the man of his destiny also read like fantasy and nightmare. The narration is alternatively taken over by an omniscient narrator, the *griot*, the *koroduwa*, Koyaga, Maclédio and, at times, the authorial voice itself.

As a satirical novel, *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* derives its strength from this multi-voicedness. Bakhtin also sees the carnival spirit as something that encourages dialogue and freedom. He argues that dialogue is opposed to the "authoritarian word" in the same way as carnival is opposed to official culture. The many voices therefore that characterize *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote's* narrative constitute dialogue, and this dialogue, combined with the satiric tone of the novel, work together to unmask and disclose the unvarnished truth under the veil of false claims and arbitrary ranks (Pormoska in Bakhtin, 1984, p. x).

If indeed *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is a demystifying and subversive text as I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, the narrator must of necessity diversify the narrative perspective of the novel. As a satirist, Kourouma aims to make the reader see things out of their normal context by defamiliarizing narrative perspectives and employing other devices that break down habitualization. A. P Foulkes sees this as an important aspect, not only for works of satire but of all art that wants to escape the snare of propaganda. He writes: "A demystifying art is by its very nature subversive and questioning art. It challenges habits and modes of perception, and produces new

ways of seeing and interpreting processes and relationships ... it must be unpredictable, surprising, even shocking ..." (1983, p. 56).

Kourouma is very inventive in *Waiting for the Wild beasts to Vote*, and the concept of the griot-narrator and the use of the *donsomana* ritual as a frame for his novel are in themselves huge leaps of the imagination. But what is more original is the way Kourouma subverts most of the traditional functions of the *griot* and makes his narrator satirical throughout the text. What also intensifies the subversions of Kourouma's *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is that throughout the novel the *griot* displays an awareness of the propagandist nature of his role. The *griot* talks of how Koyaga has forced young girls and boys from every village to sign up for the League of Revolutionary Youth. The main task of this organisation is to sing "Hymns to the Glory of the Supreme Guide", Koyaga. Addressing Koyaga directly, the narrator says: "You love to hear them sing for you, watch them dance for you ... they are your *griots*. Their poems, their speeches, their music, their songs give you strength, give you passion to last through the day" (p. 341). One of the important roles of the *griot*, that of praise-singing, is portrayed negatively above, as it is seen as intended to give an ideological bulwark to an abusive regime and help in its perpetual entrenchment.

As has been shown elsewhere in this thesis, the *griot* could also be a courtier, royal adviser or diplomat (Hale, 1998, pp.23, 24). Bingo, the *griot*-narrator uses proverbs that show how spending too much time with the politically powerful could corrupt the *griot*. For example he says: "He who spends time at the King's court will always end up betraying his friends" (p. 358). A few pages later Tiécoura lists what he calls Koyaga's grave faults. He says: "Koyaga, you have many faults, grave faults, You were, you are as tyrannous as a savage beast, as untruthful as an echo, as brutal as a lightning strike, as murderous as a lycaon, as emasculating as a castrator, *as populist as a griot*, as corrupt as a louse, as libidinous as a pair of ducks" (p. 368). It is interesting to note that being populist as a *griot* is listed among Koyaga's serious faults.

An earlier section of this thesis demonstrated how Bingo tries to steer clear of the sycophantic populist *griots*. In that instance, Bingo alludes to the fact there are official biographies of Koyaga in which his sycophants pass over the atrocities and embarrassing aspects of his reign. Bingo then tries to show that the *donsomana* and the *griot* who narrates it are different; the *donsomana* demands honesty and complete exposure on the part of the *griot* (p. 33). Bakhtin argues that in the carnival the degradation of high ranking officials is related to the lower bodily stratum. He claims that in the collective model of the grotesque “[d]egradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerative one” (p. 23). Bingo also refers to his tale as a purificatory rite and a cathartic *donsomana*, which implies that it degrades in order to regenerate (Kourouma, p.444).

It is, however, important to note that Bakhtin sees the “collective” model of the grotesque and not the “individual” one as having the capacity for a new birth and as being regenerative and productive. In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* Koyaga has greedily and selfishly appropriated the collective model of the grotesque in an attempt to stifle freedom and indefinitely perpetuate his cruel dictatorship. Throughout the year Koyaga organises official feasts or carnivals. The *griot* hints at the purpose of these feasts and, directly addressing Koyaga, he says:

In your republic the population is always on the go. The children must continually be kept occupied so that they do not get into mischief. To keep them from wondering off, from getting lost in the bush, the lioness spends the whole day playing with her cubs. [Here we see the use of traditional wisdom to legitimate the abuse of power.] The people of your republic are always celebrating or preparing a commemoration ceremony. Your officials barely have time to think. For the whole of your reign, they are lost, drunk on public carnivals. (p. 359)

Bakhtin’s description of what he terms the official feast, as opposed to the people’s carnival, resembles Koyaga’s “public carnivals”. He points out that the official feast

looked back at the past and used the past to consecrate the present, and that it asserted all that was stable, unchanging and perennial. The official feast was the triumph of a truth already established, the dominant truth that was put forward as eternal and indisputable. The official feast was monolithically serious and the element of laughter was alien to it (Bakhtin, p. 9). This is an apt description of Koyaga's feasts.

The official feast that stands out in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is the commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the coup d'état by the Father of the Nation. This commemoration was opposed to the people's carnival which is organized on the basis of laughter and is a celebration of life. The commemoration of the thirtieth year of Koyaga's rule was a 'second death, organized on the basis of sorrow'. It was a 'festive of death', if one may adapt Bakhtin's phraseology (p. 8). Starting from the preparations, people's pockets, wallets and bank accounts were systematically searched and emptied, as the *griot* says:

There were public appeals to merchants, public subscriptions established in schools, post offices, health centres and at sporting events. School children raided their own piggybanks to send to the Father of the Nation so that he might celebrate his thirtieth anniversary with dignity. Prisoners [went without] food for one day, civil servants and employees a day's salary. All these savings [were] credited to the funds for the great thirtieth anniversary celebrations ... Never in the history of the République du Golfe had such substantial sum been amassed for a celebration ... But the figure was never revealed. (p. 384-5).

As it turns out, the celebrations are designed to be a money-spinning project for Koyaga and his cronies. The coup d'état itself was nothing to celebrate because it had spilled a lot of innocent blood and had resulted in the establishment of acruel dictatorship. Right from the start therefore, the celebrations are anti-people and anti-life because they are about the satisfaction of an individual's ego, an individual who according to Tiécoura is "as tyrannous as a savage beast ... as brutal as lightning strike

... as murderous as a lycaon [and] as emasculating as a castrator...” (p. 368). There is no genuine laughter at these celebrations, only grins and sighs. There is no life, only whispers and death and a man, a leader of one of the entertainment groups, literally dies attempting to impress Koyaga with his acrobatic skills. The death of this man is symbolic of a savage regime, a regime that needs human sacrifice for its survival. In fact the celebrations bankrupt the whole nation except Koyaga and his friends, as workers across the whole country fail to get their salaries at the end of the month.

Koyaga’s feasts do not only result in the economic ruin of the people, they are also structured in such a way that they enhance his popularity by idolizing him. For example, during the thirtieth anniversary commemorations, Koyaga stands fixed like a statue in a saluting position for eight hours. Addressing Koyaga, the *griot* has the following to say about this event:

No one now among the guests is following the procession ... They stare at you, Koyaga, and you know this. You are the sole spectacle. You and the string of medals on your breast. Your left arm against your side, the fingers of your left hand on the seam of the trousers and your right hand attached to your left ear. You stand like a tree on the plain which no one can shake. You enjoy being the subject of so many stares. It boosts your ego ... Tall, still and motionless as a Palmyra palm, silent as a stone, and wild animal at bay.... (p. 396-7.

The reader is also reminded of the multi-million dollar complex that Koyaga built in Tchaotchi, his home village, in which there is his statue at every turn of the road. Concerning this complex the *griot* narrator says: “In the midst of this creation is a roundabout on which stands a tall bronze statue atop a vast monumental pedestal. A statue of Koyaga the military general facing east, his finger pointing the way” (p. 344). This and the other awe-inspiring statues of Koyaga stand opposed to the freedom and laughter associated with the grotesque body of the carnival. According to Bakhtin, the grotesque body politic “is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates

another body” (p. 317). The fact that this vast statue is facing east and its finger is also pointing in the same direction, is indicative of a regime that uses public spaces, including feasts, to look back at the past and use it to legitimate the present. This statue stands there stable, unchanging, perennial and almost divine.

“As opposed to the official feast”, Bakhtin writes “[the] carnival celebrated temporary liberation from prevailing truth and from established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions ... It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed” (p. 10). In the novel *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, this description of carnival fits the *donsomana* as a whole, the *donsomana* as a purificatory tale is structured as a festival of the people and Tiécoura the apprentice *griot* represents the aspirations of the ordinary people. As has been seen, carnivals centre on the ‘material bodily principle’, and during the carnival all that was bodily became grandiose, exaggerated and immeasurable. In other words, it became grotesque and Bakhtin points out that the essential principle of the grotesque was degradation. To degrade is to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs. It relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception and pregnancy, and birth (Bakhtin, p. 19-21).

The laughter that degrades and materializes in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* belongs to the *griot*, his apprentice and the authorial voice. It has already been argued that Tiécoura’s blunt comments, lewd language, frenzied dances and obscene performances are ways of lowering all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract and transferring it to the material level, to the sphere of the body. In fact, the *koroduwa* profession as a whole is characterized by the symbols of the carnival idiom which “are filled with the pathos of change and renewal” (Bakhtin, p.11). This can be seen from the five *koroduwas* whom Maclédio meets at the time when he was still searching for the man of his destiny. Bingo the *griot* narrator says they wore the robes, played the same flute, danced and babbled gibberish as Tiécoura does throughout the novel. The following paragraph describes these *koroduwas*, illustrating how in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* the apprentice *griot* embodies the carnival spirit:

Each *koroduwa* was dressed in the strange *koroduwa* attire. On his head, each wore a cap with the beak of an aged vulture in place of a visor; a beak that signified that every man is rapacious and feeds on carrion as much as does the loathsome vulture. And nothing more. About their necks, a gourd with which to beg their pittance, a cup to drink from, a spoon to eat with and a large bone. A large bone to signify that man is also a stray dog forever grubbing about for food. And nothing more. Over his shoulder, each wore a huntsman's pouch containing a flute to make music and a vial of antidote. A vial of antidote so that one may eat what a man offers secure in the knowledge that he will not poison you. Man does not love his neighbour, and offers him food only that he may subjugate him. And nothing more. From his belt hangs a monkey's skin, the tail slapping against his buttocks. The monkey's tail on the buttocks to signify that each man is a farter. And not something other. When he is not playing his flute, he spouts his gibberish, tells his jokes. His gibberish and jokes signify that man is a liar, a tree of lies and stupidity. And nothing, absolutely nothing more. (p. 165)

The garb of the *koroduw*as makes the world appear in its amusing aspect and in its gay relativity, and the *koroduw*as embody "carnival laughter" and the "laughter of the people". This laughter is universal in scope and is directed at everyone, including the *koroduw*as themselves. In the *donsomana* this laughter is directed at Koyaga and all other dictators, at Maclédio and all sycophants, at the *griot*, apprentice *griot*, at the readers, and even Kourouma himself, the writer of this tale. The appearance and gear of these *koroduw*as draw ambivalent but gay and triumphant laughter from the reader, but at the same time this laughter is mocking and deriding. This is the laughter which asserts and denies, buries and revives (Bakhtin, p. 11).

Throughout the novel the *griot* and the apprentice *griot*'s laughter is also the people's ambivalent laughter. It expresses a strong point of view about the sad state of affairs

of post-colonial African governance, but people laugh realizing that they are also implicated in the crimes of their leaders. The *griot's* laughter, like that of the carnival, has both a negative character and a regenerative ambivalence, and this is seen in the *griot's* fascination with the images of bodily life, such as eating, drinking, copulation and defecation.

Bakhtin argues that in the carnival the bodily principle of the lower stratum symbolizes both destruction and degradation on the one hand, and the grave and new birth on the other. In the novel *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* the narrator repeatedly emphasises that after his capture by the French colonialists, Tchao, Koyaga's father, dies "in his chains, in his urine, [and] in his excrement" (p. 15). At first the reader is puzzled with this fascination by the repulsive degraded state of Tchao. Referring to the brutalizing colonial experience he had as a child in colonial Rhodesia, Dambudzo Marechera says: "[If] one is living in an abnormal society, then only the abnormal expression can express that society. Documentaries cannot" (1992, p. 211). Marechera was explaining why his two novels, *House of Hunger* and *Black Sunlight*, are characterized by grotesque images of the bodily life of open wounds, stains of blood and semen, excrement and violent sex.

Interestingly, Koyaga also experiences brutality and violence as a child, and as a youth at the hands of the French colonizers. As a nine year old boy he witnessed his father's painful and degrading death in the French colonial prison. As a youth he is subjected to interminable naked-buttock canings by de Souza the school master. As a result, he grows up to be a violent and blasphemous youth. On one occasion he knocks down and breaks the limbs of two boys who taunt him and breaks the jaw of the general supervisor who tries to intervene. By the use of the language of the lower bodily stratum, therefore, Kourouma seems to suggest that colonial rule was abnormal and only abnormal expression can express that society.

It is also important to note that Tchao's chains, urine and excrement become, in fact, symbolically regenerative. When Koyaga is arrested for assaulting the insolent chief of staff who comes to explain to them why they cannot receive their demobilization

gratuities, he is “confined in the same cell, the same sinister cell in which his father died” (p. 85). It is from this cell that Koyaga plans his successful plot to assassinate President Fricassa. Tchao’s degraded state at the hands of the French colonialists, what Koyaga calls “the central image” (p. 15) in his life, makes him fail to silently accept President Fricassa’s corruption and abuse of power. It can be argued that up to this point when Koyaga still seems to be fighting for justice, the image of his degraded father has a positive regenerative power over him.

The griot’s concentration on images of the lower bodily stratum, especially copulation, buttocks and the genitalia, seems to lend support to the assumption that in order for the *donsomana* to have its purificatory and cathartic effect the griot should not engage in euphemistic exercises. Tchao and Nadjouma consummate their abduction marriage with twenty archers who accompanied them watching in hiding not far away from where the two lovers are engaged in the ritual romantic wrestling (p. 40). The Naked People’s marriage by abduction, which entailed raping the girl before approving and admiring spectators, is a degrading and violent process which lacks any regenerative power because it is designed as a tool of patriarchal oppression meant to condemn women to perpetual subservient positions.

The fact that Nadjouma’s rape is mere ritual does not diminish its violent nature and grotesqueness, and somehow imbue it with regenerative powers. In this play-acting, women are the visible victims who have to defend themselves, and because it is a ritual, they have little say in the matter. If they want social acceptance they have to play along with this veiled and degraded male violence, which is a form of pornography. For the purposes of discussion, therefore, Nadjouma’s ritual rape will be treated as rape. James W. Prescott claims that rape does not only destroy sensual pleasure in women and enhance sadistic pleasure in men but that “through rape, man defends himself from the sensual pleasures of women which threaten his position of dominance” (1975, p. 18). Nadjouma’s rape is one among many instances where Kourouma displays an acute awareness of the power relations connected with sexuality and women’s predicament in society.

This use of ritual rape or actual rape and violence to oppress and degrade women is opposed to Bakhtin's carnival spirit of the material bodily principle. The leading themes of the material bodily life are images of "fertility, growth, and a brimming over-abundance" (p. 19). These images are associated with the lower bodily stratum and they therefore degrade but this is the degradation that "digs a bodily grave for a new birth", because they figuratively hurl the individual "down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and new birth takes place" (p. 21).

In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* what Michel Foucault refers to as a "medicalization of sexuality" (1980, p. 191) is seen in the creation of military campaign brothels (MCBs) by the French colonial military authorities for their colonial infantrymen. The reason behind the setting up of these military campaign brothels is succinctly expressed by the griot-narrator: "Above all and in particular, the colonial army was concerned to satisfy the sexual fury of the infantryman. The colonial officers claimed that an infantryman stuffed with rice was barely serviceable until he had visited the brothel" (p. 33). Since colonial rule was a highly patriarchal and violent system, it is not surprising that the French colonizers did not care about the emotional, psychological and sensual needs of women. What they were only concerned about was the curbing of the possible mutinies among their infantrymen if their "sexual fury" (Kourouma, p. 33) was not satisfied. Fatima, the head prostitute at Post PK204 where Koyaga was stationed during the Indo-China war, was expected to "satisfy thirty-or-so soldiers every night" before sleeping with Koyaga the rest of the night. The process of setting up MBCs was itself a violent and dehumanizing affair. The narrator says: "Military patrols [were] arranged for beaters to flush out the local jungle and ... capture a number of Vietnamese girls. The Vietnamese girls were placed under the command of the chief prostitutes (privileged Moroccan prostitutes who were given the rank and status of officers) who planned and set up military campaign brothels, MBCs, at each camp" (p. 33).

Futhermore, there is ample evidence in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* which shows the ritualisation and politicisation of sexuality in Africa. In the text there is also the example of Principal Dymo Lodia, with whom Maclédio stays briefly after being

chased away by his uncle Koro who accuses him of being a cannibal sorcerer. Principal Dymo permits his wives to cheat on him and the narrator says:

At the end of each school year, after the vocational exams, he would invite a school girl into his classroom ... and brutally rape her. Once the sin had been consummated, his insides would be tormented with remorse, giving him diarrhoea. He would cry as much as his hapless victim, whom he would wash delicately ... He would denounce his despicable act and vomit with shame. Still in tears, he would sing and cry out poems for the rest of the night. For two weeks, he would not return to his house, his wives or his children. He would sleep on a school bench under the stars watching the movement of the planets in the firmament and interpreting the night-time howls of hyenas after the moon had set ... (p. 147)

Principal Dymo apparently rapes the little girls for ritual purposes. In some parts of Africa it is still common to hear reports of men who rape toddlers because they believe that it will cure their HIV status or cleanse them of some supposed bad luck.

The next chapter of this thesis further explores the relationship between satire and its use of images of the bodily life, and argues that satire is primarily an instrument of aggression and not of aesthetics.

CHAPTER FIVE

IMAGES OF BODILY LIFE AND SATIRE

Claude Rawson (1984, p.v) argues that “satire ... [is] an instrument of aggression” and Ahmadou Kourouma admits that his novel *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is “a satire on dictatorships” (Gray 2001, p. 122). Richard K. Priebe is therefore right when he observes that Kourouma’s “irony is so often acerbic, so sardonic even,” but then completely misses the purpose of satire when he goes on to say that “it (Kourouma’s irony) constantly threatens both the beauty and understanding his writing offers” (2005, p.46). Satire as a tool of attack does not rely on aesthetic or literary understanding to achieve its aim of persuading the reader “that vice is both ugly and rampant”, instead it uses calculated techniques of distorting, excluding, and slanting of information (Kernan 1962, p. 174).

In an interview with Yves Chemla, Kourouma denies that he uses excessive exaggeration in his depiction of post-colonial dictatorship. He had the following to say about *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*: “[W]hat I say about the dictators is not excessive; what I say is true” (1999, p.27). If then Kourouma is a truth teller as he claims, Christiane Ndiaye (2007, p.102) asks the inevitable question, “Where then is the fiction in Kourouma’s work?” When the question was put to him by Catherine Argard, Kourouma answered: “Only the manner in which the events are weaved together. I fictionalize the truth” (p. 1). In another interview with Gérard Meudal he suggests that it is humour which makes his works fiction. However, this question becomes less relevant when it is understood that one is dealing with satire and that satire as an antagonistic genre defies all rigid forms of literary classification. In Michael Bakhtin’s language, satire relies on the grotesque images which are always ambivalent, contradictory, ugly, monstrous, and hideous from the point of view of “classic” aesthetics (1984, p.24).

The Italian satirist Danielle Luttazzi agrees with Bakhtin’s notion that “satire exhibits the grotesque body, which is dominated by the primary needs (eating, drinking, defecating, urinating, [and] sex), to celebrate the victory of life: the social and the corporeal are joyfully joined in something indivisible, universal and beneficial” (2007, p. 1). Satire celebrates life in that it is hostile to all evils that threaten the

freedom of the human spirit. This chapter will build on the issues raised in the previous chapter, focusing on images of bodily life and highlighting how dictatorships appropriate the positive carnival-grotesque function of these images by stripping them of their “carnival spirit with its freedom, its utopian character oriented towards the future” (Bakhtin 1984, p.33), leaving them only with a destructive and negative aspect.

Right from the onset, in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* Kourouma makes use of grotesque images of bodily life in his portrayal of the nakedness of the Paleo People. Their nakedness is presented as an ambivalent phenomenon which simultaneously protects but also makes them vulnerable. Tchao, Koyaga’s father, observes:

For thousands of years nakedness and nakedness alone has protected us from the Mandingos, the Haoussas (sic), the Peuls, the Mossi, the Songhai, the Berbers, the Arabs ... It is because of our nakedness that every invader, every empire builder, every evangelist of some alien faith, has despised us and deemed us too savage to be fellow believers, to be exploitable. (p.14)

But, as in the case of the Biblical story of Adam and Eve who started to view their nakedness as shameful after partaking of the forbidden fruit, Tchao is attracted to the European culture of clothing after being awarded war medals for his heroic exploits in the French colonial army in World War I. As a way of solving his dilemma of how to display his war medals, Tchao commits the “grievous transgression” of striding about the mountains from dawn to dusk in his bemedalled army jacket. This attraction to foreign ways proves fatal for Tchao and leads to the demise of the Mountain people as a sovereign society.

There is ambiguity, though, in Tchao’s punishment and the destruction that befalls his people. As in Adam and Eve’s case, where their disobedience also leads to their ability to distinguish between good and evil, Tchao’s encounter with French culture did not just bring negative consequences: it opened his eyes to the realisation “that the world was for clothed people” (p. 14). It appears, though, that eventually someone had to pay for the Mountain People to enter into the new world of clothes, since

Tchao says: “I sacrificed myself chiefly for you (Koyaga) and also for the youth of all the Paleo tribes We cannot enter this world unless we clothe ourselves, unless we abandon our nakedness” (p. 14). The irony of course is that for Koyaga, his father’s sacrifice does not only give him a passport into the world of clothed people, but he subsequently becomes the all-powerful leader of the Paleo people and other clothed tribes.

James W. Prescott observes: “Nudity, like sex, can be misused and abused, and this fear often prevents us from accepting the honesty of our bodies” (1975, p.18). For fear of being irrelevant in the ever-changing world, and being labelled as uncivilized savages, the Paleo tribes are persuaded into abandoning their nakedness. Kourouma also describes the tragic but comic scene of the naked Paleo warriors irresistibly being drawn into laying aside their poisoned arrows in order to participate in the *harmattan* season wrestling matches, in complete disregard of the fact that they are at war with the French colonialists. This tragi-comic situation is captured in Tiécoura’s mocking comment, which also satirizes Europe’s stereotypical perception of Africa, when he says: “Clearly, in the exhilaration of the games, the naked man – the fathers of all Negroes, fashioned of music and dance - had forgotten that they were at war” (p. 11). It is after this incident that the Paleo tribes are defeated and conquered and their hero Tchao tortured to death in a French colonial prison. The foregoing seem to confirm Philip Thomson’s observation that “a grotesque scene conveys the notion of [being] simultaneously laughable and horrifying and disgusting” (1972, p. 3).

The fact that the Paleos risked their lives and freedom to participate in the *harmattan* wrestling matches indicates that these games had a deep symbolic significance for their identity as a sovereign people. These matches were like a carnival, and Bakhtin argues that “carnival is the people’s second life, organized on the basis of laughter. It is a festival of life,” but he further observes, “Moreover, through all the stages of historic development feasts were linked to moments of crisis, of breaking points in the circle of nature or in the life of society and man. Moments of death and revival, of change and renewal always led to a festive perception of the world” (p. 8-9). These games are not only held at a breaking point in the circle of nature, but they are also linked with a moment of crisis in the existence of Paleo society and the life of their hero, Tchao. As has been argued, this is a crisis that leads to both destruction and

renewal, since it gives the Paleo people entrance into new experiential forms of living, and participation in the new world ushered in by European colonial expansion.

In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, the prevalent use of the grotesque images of bodily life is seen in Kourouma's portrayal of women. For example, grotesque imagery is used to dislocate existing gender norms in the portrayal of Nadjouma, Koyaga's mother. Nadjouma's beauty and other physical attributes are described in proverbial terms. Her feminine qualities are further foregrounded by her excellent bed skills, which lead nurse Kaboré, a man who had been requested by his five wives to console Nadjouma in bed during the night of her husband's burial as per custom, to abandon his wives even after fulfilling the ritual act. As a woman living in a patriarchal society, Nadjouma's gender and physical appearance associate her with what Hazel Carby calls the four cardinal virtues of true womanhood: "piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity" (1987, p.23). However, there are certain grotesque incongruities in Nadjouma's character which threaten to disrupt existing sexual categories. For example, she appropriates male characteristics by being a feared wrestling champion, as she could defeat any man in the arena. This is seen when she wrestles with the champion Tchao, during her abduction marriage. The paradoxical presentation of Nadjouma is captured in the following description:

Nadjouma was not only a great [wrestling] champion in her youth ... she was also a turtle-dove who was as small as a poinsettia and seemed rooted to the ground like a palm. Her breasts and buttocks were ... as firm as the rocks of the mountains. She braided her hair into a monitor lizard's tail, and night and day she wore a band of white cloth about her head. (p. 47)

The contradiction of the masculine strength one needs to be a celebrated wrestling champion and the beautiful looks one needs to be a model feminine figure is apparent in the above depiction. Nadjouma's character is further complicated by her rejection of feminine duties such as having more children after the birth of Koyaga and her staying unmarried after the death of Tchao. It seems Nadjouma no longer wants anything that will associate her with feminine woes and weaknesses. Furthermore, when nurse Kaboré "tasted Nadjouma, loved her and did not want to be parted with

her” (p. 47), she refuses marriage by falling into a near fatal-trance. The marabout Bokano later reveals that she is the wife of *Fa*, the spirit of divination, which calls for her to abstain from all sexual relations or risk killing herself and her partners. Before long, the marabout claims that it has been revealed to him that Nadjouma should be the female possessor of the sought after *aeroelite*, and asks her to come and stay with him at Hairaidougou (‘the village of happiness’). What makes Nadjouma’s situation anything but tragic is the fact that it is implied that the marabout gives her preferential treatment on the basis of her stunning physical beauty.

The marabout’s confusion starts when Nadjouma is brought to him wearing a skirt that is loosely draped by the distraught Kaboré. About this event the narrator says: “The marabout became confused in his incantations, he cleared his throat and several times began again to reel off a series of *Allahu akbars*, to run through the appropriate incantations” (p. 61). When the patient is painfully whipped by one of Bokano’s crazy disciples, she screams and runs, and in the process her skirt falls, and “for a second, the marabout could study the young woman’s body at his leisure [as she runs away]. In an unexpected, but by then somewhat overdue gesture, he sent the skirt to the woman and had her brought to him” (p. 61). Afterwards, when Nadjouma is healed and sent away, the marabout is even less able to focus on his spiritual pursuits:

Many months after they had gone their separate ways, the marabout continued to think of the young woman. When he wished to be completely at one, body and soul with Allah the all-powerful, she prevented him ... the marabout was in the habit of going out of his house and sitting on the threshold to observe the heavens ... This pursuit had been interrupted several times by the unwelcome, blasphemous flare-up of the visions of the young woman. In the heavens he could make out the face of the young woman, her musculature, her skirt half undone and even ... (p. 64)

The irony of Nadjouma’s situation, of course, is that in the end she becomes a model female under the tutelage of Bokano and displays the four cardinal virtues of womanhood: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Both traditional African pre-colonial systems and the world’s dominant religious organisations are portrayed

as patriarchal, and women can only have power and happiness if they are submissive to their superior authority. A woman's divinity, as in the case with Nadjouma, is bestowed on her by men who worship her for her beautiful physical appearance, and when it is convenient for them to do so.

Simone de Beauvoir (1997, p.15) argues that a woman is imprisoned by peculiarities such as ovaries and the uterus that "circumscribe her within the limits of her nature." As a result of the biological differences between the female and male bodies, in patriarchal societies women's bodies are likely to be viewed as more grotesque than male bodies. What happens to the woman who eventually becomes one of nurse Kaboré's wives is a case in point. After restoring to health a man who had fallen into the hands of Panther men (hired killers), as a gesture of gratitude the man asks Kaboré to choose between a pig and his eldest daughter. The insinuation of the gift is that a girl child resembles a pig in both value and physical appearance. Pigs are associated with all manner of the grotesque, such as physical deformity, dirt and all the disgusting aspects of life. Peter Stallybrass says that "a frequent cause of disgust [is] the pig's specific habits: its ability to digest its own and human faeces as well as other 'garbage'; its resistance to full domestication; [and] its need to protect its tender skin from sunburn by wallowing in the mud" (1986, p. 45). In the light of Stallybrass's words there is obvious debasement of the female body in the gift that the wounded father makes to the male nurse. The implication is that the gift is an insult both to Kaboré and his bride. As it is seen in the experience of Nadjouma and the five sisters who become Kaboré's wives, women seem to suffer the same fate as that of pigs in most cultures that are depicted in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*; when it suits men, they are either celebrated or reviled.

The low value placed on the female body is further highlighted by the fact that, in the end, all five daughters of the grateful father end up as Kaboré's wives against his will. The irony, of course, is that Kaboré does not find fulfilment and happiness in his five human gifts, instead they become a source of irritation and boredom. He is so dissatisfied with his lot in life that he illogically attempts to remedy the situation by getting a sixth wife through marriage by abduction, which incidentally will enable him to be culturally defined as a real man. The following quotation describes Kaboré's experience of his forced polygamous marriage:

The five sisters were alike as five shoots of millet. Each tall and slightly curved and slender as the vines of the *wapiwapo*. Every season they were either expecting a child or nursing a child and so reeked day and night of the same lingering smell, a mingled smell of newborn vomit and piss. The nurse was suffering from the most terrible inconveniences which a polygamous husband endures: that of experiencing each of his wives as the same bed, the same body, the same spice, the same millet beer. When at night he turned to find one or another of them, he simply felt bored. The same boredom that polygamy was invented to allay. (p. 48)

It is interesting to note that the words used to describe the five sisters belong to the images of bodily life such as millet and spice, and their bodies are described as perpetually grotesque as a result of either pregnancy or the smell of newborn vomit and piss. There is constant reference to these women as dull sex objects, and Kaboré is portrayed as the tortured innocent victim of his wives' gross bodies. Of note is the fact that the narrative is silent about Kaboré's own physical functions. The griot's unrelenting focus on the biological bodily functions of the female body is meant to degrade and debase women and condemn them to perpetual positions of inferiority. The food and drink imagery which is used in the biological description of Kaboré's wives implies that instead of growing they are decaying, and instead of regenerating they are degenerating, a negative development without any hope of renewal. As Toril Moi (1999, p. 196) argues, for women living under patriarchy the body is a far more inescapable fact than it is for men. The satirical narrator seems to be attacking the Paleo culture which views women's bodies purely as toys for men's pleasure.

After explaining how political power is shared among four men in the République du Golfe after the assassination of President Fricassa Santos, the *griot* exclaims: "Power is a woman who cannot be shared" (p. 121-22). This generalization about women is proved wrong on a number of occasions by the novel's narrative of the events that involve Maclélio. Maclélio, in his journeys in search for the man of his destiny, finds himself among the Tuareg, a desert people who practice polyandry. The Tuareg way of life forbids a husband from reproaching his wife for her infidelities, and a married

woman has liberty to engage in sexual relations with whomever she desires. Women's social freedom is symbolically represented by their Princess, who is force-fed from the age of seven and given in marriage at thirteen, already elephantine and ten times the size of her Prince husband. The body size of the Princess disabled her since she can no longer move around, bath or even eat without some assistance from a servant, and this confirms Thomson's observation that "the grotesque has a strong affinity with the physically abnormal" (p. 8).

Kourouma's narrative seems to oscillate between sharp patriarchy and subversive matriarchy, as seen in the Tuareg custom whereby, as soon as the Princess's husband leaves the tent, one of her many lovers creeps in, laying claim to the threshold by placing his *sambaras* there. The narrator says: "No one then could displace him nor indeed interrupt him, not even her husband. The Tuareg way of life forbade any man, even a husband, to enter a tent in which a lady had company" (p. 179). Contrary to the common cliché that power is a woman who cannot be shared, the Tuareg community is an example of a society that has learnt tolerance and adopted a carnivalistic view of sexual relations, and a woman's body is nobody's property except her own.

Maclédio, although a mere slave that guards the door to the Princess' tent, is also subsequently invited to come and have a share of the Princess' sexual largesse. Upon entering the tent Maclédio is stupefied by what he sees and this is what he says: "Indescribable, unique! The fleshiest legs in the world hoisted in the air. The flabbiest buttocks resting on the carpet and in between ... a femininity which is, quite simply, planetary" (p. 179). Maclédio's description of the Princess' massive body which could only be bathed wholly once a year, and her planetary femininity, mocks the irrationality and pettiness of men's struggles for power, since power as it is symbolized by the Princess, is so vast that all the Tuareg men, including slaves like Maclédio, can have a share without having to kill their perceived enemies as dictators do throughout the novel. Maclédio eventually gets the Princess pregnant and this is an example of a society where princes and slaves drink from the same source and therefore become equals. The Tuareg way of life seems to exude a perpetual festive atmosphere, confirming Bakhtin's observation that the "carnival celebrated temporary liberation from prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (p. 9). Once a

Tuareg man had sealed the Princess' tent entrance with his sandals he became a prince and enjoyed the Princess' sexual bounty without any fear of disturbance or retribution from the jealous husband. It seems, therefore, that the sexual freedom that the Tuareg enjoy symbolically stands for temporary liberation from hierarchical rank, privileges and norms.

On another occasion Maclédio has sexual relations with Helene, one of Chief Founding of Bamiléké's many wives, with the husband's tacit approval. It appears that it was a well-established tradition that the male servants who resided at the Bamiléké court would help the Chief by deputizing for him in his nocturnal duties, for the Chief had 212 wives all of whom he could not reasonably be expected to satisfy. Interestingly, among the Bamiléké the Chief's wives are classified under servants, pigs and other property that the Chief owns, and the Chief can have sexual relations with any of the 36 000 of his female subjects. The only mistake a male servant who deputizes for the chief at night can make is to refuse to withdraw from a woman whom the chief wants to spend the night with or to get emotionally attached to any child that he produces with one of the chief's wives. All the children that are born to the chief's wives are regarded as his, and transgressing these simple rules almost costs Maclédio his life. For Chief Founding it seems that the 231 children that are called by his name are symbols of virility, manhood and indomitable strength and energy, and this is then used to rationalize the Chief's indefinite dictatorial hold on power.

Kourouma's satire seems to be assessing the complicity of traditional prestige and patronage systems in the contemporary political chaos and decline into despicable forms of dictatorship. Instead of focusing on the administration of the state the Bamiléké Chief spends a better part of his time having sex with his 212 wives and any other woman that he lusts after. Lampooning the Chief, the narrator says: "It was unquestionably a gruelling duty which, added to his many other duties, left Chief Founding shattered. The Chief was permanently exhausted" (p. 152). Kourouma's perceptive satire and deflatory grotesque realism do not exempt tradition and the past, but show them to be deeply implicated in post-colonial African misrule.

Koyaga follows in the footsteps of Chief Founding and many other pre-colonial rulers, for he "consorts with many women [and] consumes them in great numbers" (p.

249), and similarly makes producing babies one of his life's main preoccupations. The narrator says:

He is a Paleo, he is of a race, a people, for whom marriage and companionship do not mean fidelity. Koyaga therefore loves, pursues, uses women in typical Paleo fashion ... He endeavours to bestow children on his partners ... [he] believes that the purpose, the chief purpose of women is reproduction. He considers himself defiled, reproaches himself publicly, if he sleeps with a woman for several weeks without succeeding in impregnating her. (p. 349)

The result is that Koyaga ends up with more than a hundred mistresses with whom he has an undetermined number of children. The living expenses of all his mistresses and former mistresses and their children constitute an important part of the state's expenses. Former mistresses also have easy access to bank credits and they end up as 'Benz mummies', rich, buxom businesswomen who ride around in the back seat of their Mercedes Benzes. In fact in the République du Golfe computers are first introduced to facilitate the computing and administration of Koyaga's mistresses' allowances and the rents on their houses!

Most other post-colonial African dictators in the text also prioritize their sexual gratification over the efficient administration of their countries. For example, Emperor Bossouma of Pays aux Deux Fleuves (his name in the Malinké language means 'fart stink') is a model of licentiousness, depravity, and debasement. This is symbolized both by his name and his mouth, which perpetually reeks "of the stench of a hyena's anus" (p. 238). On the occasion when Koyaga is departing from his country after being initiated into dictatorship, Bossouma insists on accompanying his guest all the way to his next destination, because the only appointment he has on his diary on that particular day is with a Zendé mistress, whom he has no strength to satisfy. Kourouma's portrayal of Bossouma is the height of political caricature, for upon their arrival at the airport of the République des Ėbènes and without waiting for diplomatic welcoming etiquette, he grabs his penis with both his hands and noisily heads for the urinal where he re-emerges dragging one of the girls in charge of cleaning the toilets by her hand, and in less than five minutes commits himself to one of the thirty

marriages he celebrates each year, making an average of three marriages a month! For him life is a perpetual carnival, a carnival that digs a bottomless grave for his people and country. In this way the satirist portrays post-colonial Africa as ruled by idiotic and savage perverts who know nothing about governance and engage in perverted sexual relations and criminal violence.

In an obvious attempt to consolidate their cruel reigns, most African dictators appropriate and misuse the traditional system of arranged marriages. For example, in Koyaga's *République du Golfe* the numerous daughters that he has with his wives and mistresses all marry army officers, and there is not a chief-of-staff or a regimental commanding officer who is not a son or at least a son-in-law of Koyaga. Nepotism and blood ties, and not merit, carry the day and all this ensures the political entrenchment of the dictator.

Nkoutigui Fondio, the Man in White, the president of the *République des Monts*, also gives Maclédio one of his mistresses to be his wife, to ensure his loyalty and to keep him monitored. As a result of this marriage Maclédio is quickly promoted to Head of Ideology at the radio station, a post that makes him senior to the Minister of Information. However, being a close relative to dictators is not always a guarantee that one will always be safe, as Maclédio soon finds out. His marriage and important position fail to protect him from almost being tortured to death on trumped-up charges by the masochistic dictator. Maclédio narrowly escapes death when 72 of his co-accused are executed by Nkoutigui, in the ritualistic belief that these human sacrifices will make him an invincible leader. Koyaga also has Commander Tchao, his brother-in-law, and Captain Sama his son-in-law, emasculated and murdered on coup plot charges. All these incidents portray the dictators of post-colonial Africa as "connoisseurs of cruelty who meticulously mete out ingenious torture and death to offenders or unfortunates who learn too much about their secret evils, easily outstripping their imperial rivals in their wanton disregard for human life" (Wright 2004, p. 801).

It is noteworthy, however, that Kourouma was concerned that most of his critics would read his novels selectively, portraying him as an African truth-teller, and felt that the truths that are seen by his readership were not always those he sought to

express (Ndiaye, 2007, p. 101). Concerning *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* he says: “What I say about Houphouët, Bokassa and others has already been written. This is history” (Yves Chemla, 1999, p. 27). Yet Christian Ndiaye points out that Kourouma was also aware that all the violence exposed in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* risks being perceived as one of those “absolute truths” characteristic of Africa (2007, p. 102). That is why he felt obliged to point out that with regard to *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* “the first violence ... is the one levied by the colonizers and their ethnologists” (Chemla, p. 28). It is therefore imperative to read Kourouma’s satire as expressing the general human condition which is characterized by violence and oppression, but from an Afro-centric perspective.

The involvement of the masses in the heart-rending misgovernance of post-colonial Africa is captured in Tiécoura’s grotesque portrayal of the crowd that comes to bid farewell to Koyaga at Fasso Airport in the République des Ébènes:

The whole airport trembled with tom-toms and festivities, happy, senseless, half-naked Negroes dancing dangerous, acrobatic monkey dances until they were breathless. Women, schoolchildren and old men in traditional dress jostled each other like herds all along the road from the guest palace to the airport. They clapped ceaselessly like half-wits, shouted themselves hoarse, [and] howled idiotic slogans like deaf people. (p. 237)

On another occasion, during what was termed “the triumphal march”, some women wash Koyaga’s smelly feet and drink of the water. As the march progresses women keep on exposing their nudity by degrees until in one village they drop even their panties and only wear strings of pearls around their hips as a way of showing their welcome for the father of the nation. One chief gives seven of his daughters in marriage to Koyaga during this march. African post-colonial dictators seem to have a magical ability to make a majority of their citizens “develop a fatalistic and imbecilic vocation for degradation” (Wright, 2004, p. 808). The fact that old men in traditional dress and chiefs are also jostling with the “imbecilic” crowd is a heavy indictment of

the ancestral past, which seems to have bequeathed a legacy of misrule, violence and perversion to the post-colonial Africa.

In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* copulation is depicted as an ambivalent symbol of both degradation and regeneration. This is seen in the cruelty of Nkoutigui Fondio, the dictator of the République des Ébènes, who after executing his victims has sexual relations with their wives on the same night their husbands are killed. By this act the dictator displays godlike powers: ritually pacifying and disempowering the would-be vengeful spirits by sexually humiliating their wives, in so doing condemning his victims to eternal ignominy. This the dictator achieves by stripping the sexual act of all its humanizing, carnivalesque and utopian characteristics oriented towards the future and turning it into a cruel and selfish means of maintaining the status quo.

The narrator in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* exclaims that the Zendé, a tribe in Emperor Bossouma's Pays des Deux Fleuves, "are some of the wisest and most intelligent peoples in the world because they alone consider love to be both a great art and sport" (p. 246). In love tournaments little girls are taught how to tame a man's sexual enthusiasm. After conquering a man in bed and extracting a verbal admission of defeat, a Zendé woman then abandons him, "drained, useless" ties her skirt and goes out into the street, house to house, shop to shop, "brandishing his underpants and boasting of her exploit" (Kourouma, p. 246). In most cultures sex is seen as either sinful or sacred and is therefore "restricted and devoted to procreation" (Foucault 1982, p. 191), but the Zendé have the good sense to view it as a liberating art and sport which women can symbolically wield to break free from patriarchal domination. With their sexual artistry, Zendé women undermine the traditional use of sex as a political and patriarchal apparatus in the hands of men, and employ it as something that unfetters women and puts the dominant values under siege.

The Zendé women therefore enact the grotesque imagery of copulation and "its power to liberate from dogmatism, completeness, and limitation" (Bakhtin 1984, p. 44). This is seen when fierce and murderous dictators like Koyaga and Emperor Bossouma are all humbled in bed into begging for forgiveness "aloud, with all [their] mouth[s]" (p. 247), when they are sapped of all their sexual obsession and vigour by the Zendé bed

specialists. Ironically, the Zendé love experts are unable to permanently cure African post-colonial dictators of their sadism and brutal traits because Emperor Bossouma, their leader, is one of the most awful torturers and abusers of human rights. He degrades and debases his victims to the level of eating their own faeces and drinking their own urine. One of Bossouma's former right hand-men, Colonel Zaban, is tortured into begging to be killed. When Bossouma is proudly initiating Koyaga into dictatorship and they are inspecting Ngaragla, a notorious prison for politically detainees, Colonel Zaban soulfully begs: "Kill me. For once in your life, be human. Hang me. Shoot me, kill me now" (p. 247). Bossouma is also the same dictator who keeps a lecherous male leper on standby to rape the wives, daughters or mothers of his enemies, right before their eyes, in order to extract a false confession from them. He exploits grotesque bodily images for his personal political benefit, and as a symbol of permanent and destructive degradation.

Koyaga, on the other hand, kills his enemies, cuts off their genitals and stuffs them into their mouths. The uncircumcised are less fortunate; they are emasculated and fed their bloody genitals still fully alive. This is the fate that befalls Colonel Ledjo, president of the National Assembly after the coup, and Tima, president of the National Assembly, who are fed their penises and bloody testicles with their eyes wide open. Thomson correctly points out that "the extreme incongruity associated with the grotesque is itself ambivalent in that it is both comic and monstrous." (p. 8). Commenting on Koyaga's style of execution, the narrator says: "A man emasculated ceases being a man; he becomes human carrion, the quarry of vultures" (p. 133). The narrator also explains the rationale behind emasculating one's murder victims: "This is a ritual emasculation. Every human life carries with it an immanent force. A latent force which avenges death by attacking its killer. The killer may neutralise this force by emasculating the victims" (p. 109).

Koyaga's ritual emasculations may also be understood in the light of what Bakhtin says about the carnival-grotesque's functions. He says that to degrade "means to concern oneself with the lower body ... and the reproductive organs" (1984, p. 21). Koyaga is obsessed with the reproductive organs but not in a positive carnivalesque way. He values female reproductive organs because he exploits them for self-gratification and uses women as cogs in his large political machine. The male

reproductive organs threaten his hold on power, so they must be cut off and fed to their victims as a way of eliminating all kind of opposition. He mortifies his victims by emasculating them as a symbolic way of hurling them “into the void of non-existence, into absolute degradation.” Koyaga’s “is no longer the positive, regenerating lower stratum, but a blunt and deathly obstacle to the ideal aspirations” (Bakhtin, p. 21-3).

The following chapter, in a more positive vein, will focus on the carnivalesque and myth, drawing some parallels between Bakhtin’s notions of the carnivalesque and the *donsomana*, in an attempt to understand Kourouma’s extensive satire of African leadership problems.

CHAPTER SIX

MYTH AND THE POWER OF INVERSION

The Complete Review points out that “much of *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is based on fact, but Kourouma presents it in a radically transformed way. He has accelerated the transformation of history into myth: the novel reads like a saga of mythical days of old, filled with the supernatural and the superhuman” (2007, p. 4). This use of myth allows the reader to engage with history. Kourouma is able to transform his facts by entrusting his narrative to the griot Bingo, who adopts a jesting tone and addresses his tale to his apprentice griot, whom he refers to as a king’s fool. The transformation of facts also happens because the narrative is framed within a traditional ritual of purification which adheres to certain cultural conventions that are characterised by the use of irony and satire as unmasking tools and “the disclosure of the unvarnished truth under the veil of the false claims and arbitrary ranks” (Krystyna Pomorska in Bakhtin, 1984, X).

Kourouma’s satire is also characterized by the use of what Vissarion Belinsky calls “laughter through tears”. This is seen when Tiécoura clowns and smiles when he is in fact disclosing horrendous truths about Koyaga’s rule. In this respect the purification tale is very similar to M. M. Bakhtin’s description of the carnivalesque because European carnivals according to Bakhtin, symbolically demonstrated that world history is like a drama in which “every age was accompanied by a laughing chorus” (p.xxii). The mythical terms and the light-hearted manner in which Bingo the griot relates the atrocities of Koyaga and other African dictators shows the same spirit as that evident in the carnivals, that laughter is an integral part of the pursuit of liberty.

The purification tale is also similar to European carnivals in that both were apparently sanctioned by the authorities as some kind of safety valve for passions of the common people which might otherwise be directed to a revolution. But as Michael Holquist points out, carnivals and indeed purification tales like Koyaga’s, are not only impediments to revolution, they are also revolution themselves (p.xviii). However, Richard Kearney points out that “national myths can be used to liberate a community or incarcerate that community in tribal bigotry” (1991, p.68). On the surface, carnivals

gave the impression of being sanctioned by the authorities, but Holquist argues that they ultimately derived their power from certain compelling social dynamics that demand a voice, social dynamics that were so powerful that when the authorities sanctioned a carnival they were in fact deferring to them.

Koyaga seems to be the one licensing the purification tale, but in reality Koyaga has little choice in the matter. This is evident in Bingo's address to Koyaga: "For years, your *maman* and the marabout had told you time and again what you should do if one day you were to find yourself lost: you must have your purificatory rite as a master hunter, your cathartic *donsomana* recounted by a *sora*, a chronicler of hunters, and his responder ... you know that if they have said all, when you have confessed all, admitted all, there will be no more shadows on your path..." (p. 444). However, just as the authorities tried to appropriate the carnival spirit for their selfish needs of ideologically imprisoning the common folk, so Kourouma shows how Koyaga tries to use traditional ritual and national myths in the pursuit of individual ends of regaining absolute power.

In its everyday usage the word "myth" usually refers to the incredible and the fantastic. But Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardo (1995, p. 1) point out that the word "myth" comes from the Greek word *mythos*, which means "word", "speech", "tale", or "story". In the light of the above definitions the novel *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* as a whole can be viewed as a myth because it is made of tales or stories. Consequently, the entire novel can be seen as one big mythical story, with Kourouma as the mythmaker.

Admittedly, *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* has numerous instances of the incredible and the fantastic as myth is commonly understood in everyday speech. The novel is also made up of stories which at first may read like fantasy, but which are in fact derived from true historical accounts. This shows that, in myth, a very thin line divides fantasy and reality. It is also noteworthy that the narrator in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* makes it clear again and again throughout the narrative that what may be called fantasy in one culture may be viewed as common experience in other cultures. Thus this thesis will not engage with the argument of whether the mythical events in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* are credible or not, but rather it will

focus on the satirical and aesthetic effects of these stories in relation to the meaning of the novel as a whole.

Bingo, the griot-narrator, exclaims:

Ah, Koyaga, master hunter! You are of the race of the high-born
whose egg is laid by the sparrow hawk and hatched by the raven ...
Your mother, skilled in geomancy (and bearer of an aerolite) has as
her confidant, her master and her friend a marabout who had neither
father nor mother and who carries with him a centuries-old Qur'an.
(p. 70)

These are the opening words of the Second Vigil of *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, and the narrator gives the theme of this section of the *donsomana* as death. It is in this section that Koyaga kills the four mythical beasts. The detached manner in which Kourouma treats these mythical stories as if they are both everyday occurrences and real historical accounts shows that what may be termed history and myth are both valid, but different, ways in which a people view and interpret their past.

For example, in his attempt to escape capture and assassination by Koyaga, President Fricassa Santos of the mythical République du Golfe magically plunges the whole country into darkness by triggering a country-wide power cut, and also transforms himself into many other things such as needles, clothes and wind. At dawn on his assassination day, President Santos transforms himself into a whirlwind and shifts back into human form when he gets into the American embassy that is adjacent to his residence. The narrator realises that it will be difficult for the modern sceptical reader to accept this story without relegating it to mere fantastic imagination, and he adds the following comment: "The uninitiated, in their ignorance, will question this version of events. They will say there was a tunnel between the President's residence and the embassy compound ... Obviously it is a childish explanation for the White Man who requires reason to understand" (p. 108). In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, after seeing and talking to the ghost of the former king of Denmark, Prince Hamlet tells the sceptical and now mesmerised university scholar, his friend Horatio, that there are more things

in heaven and earth than his scholarly work can adequately explain. Although Kourouma's satire is clearly wide ranging, he seems to be making a similar statement about Western presumptuousness in offering one-dimensional explanations or dismissing as incredible fantasy everything that is beyond its experience.

Richard Kearney (1991, p. 66) argues that "the project of modernity has frequently been predicated upon a radical break with ... the myths of the past..." (in Wood, 1991, p. 66). Paul Ricoeur calls this modernity project of breaking with the myths of the past the "hermeneutics of suspicion" (1991, p. 66). Kourouma's treatment of myths in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* suggests that he sees the necessity for uncovering or unmasking the hidden truth behind some of the popular myths. But his comment about the uninitiated ignorant, who are dismissive of everything they do not understand, indicates that Kourouma's project may also be in full agreement with what Paul Ricoeur calls a "hermeneutics of affirmation", whereby myth is unmasked but at the same time its potential and positive value as a symbolic instrument for the exploration of future human possibilities is acknowledged. Ricoeur encourages demythologizing (unravelling the hidden ideological intentions and interests of myth), and is against demythicizing (destruction of myth), because as he aptly observes demythicizing would simply lead to a positivistic impoverishment of culture (1991, p. 67). Kourouma's satire is found in Koyaga's griot's perversion of the reaffirmative role of myth by monopolizing it and then using it as "a mystificatory discourse which serves to uncritically vindicate the established political power". In Paul Ricoeur's terms, Koyaga's cannot be termed genuine myth because it has an ideological intention of imprisoning the human spirit and is not concerned with the "universal emancipation of man" (1991, p.70).

Some of the most problematic material in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is in the Second Vigil, where Koyaga fights and defeats dangerous mythical beasts and magically powerful men such as President Fricassa Santos who is "swathed in magic of too many masters, and knows many magical spells, and carries about him many powerful talismans and grigri" (p. 105). The first beast that Koyaga kills after his discharge from the French colonial army on medical grounds is a lone panther "who lived only on human flesh", as Tiécoura sardonically comments (p. 72). Next to die is "a lone black buffalo, the oldest of its kind in the universe." This buffalo had killed

many villagers and terrorised everyone by ravaging the plantations. The third beast to die is “a lone elephant” that had wiped out crops, and dropped mountains of dung on the plantations” (p. 75). Last on the list of death is “a thousand-year-old saurian, the caiman of Gbelerini ... which would swallow a washerwoman whole if he was not appeased with a bull-calf, a goat and a sheep before the waters rose each year”, as Maclédio explains. These were no mere wild beasts, but monsters, evil spirits that had materialised into animal form. The sacred caiman even converses with Koyaga and threatens to make him “morning breakfast”, if he ever tries to kill it.

If we apply both “the hermeneutics of suspicion” and Ricoeur’s “hermeneutics of affirmation”, we start to gain a broader view of what Kourouma is doing with these mythical accounts. Walter Burkert argues that the mythical takes an “ineradicably anthropomorphic” form, and always fits the needs and expectations of both the teller and the audience (1995, p. 13). So the beasts that Koyaga kills appropriate some human qualities. Bingo, Koyaga’s griot, is his masters’ spokesperson and will consequently use these mythical accounts to further the ideological interests and intentions of his master. The stories are evidently intended to gratify Koyaga, and also redeem his waning popularity by portraying him as a superhuman saviour of his people, and by killing the dangerous wild beasts Koyaga is also depicted as the protector and food provider for his people. After Koyaga has gunned down the colossal lone elephant, the griot says: “From all around, from the mountains, the villages of the forts, the people came bearing knives to get fresh supplies of meat. There was enough for everyone: men, hyenas and vultures” (Kourouma, p. 76). As a result, Koyaga is raised to the level of a deity.

The griot indicates one of the purposes of these mythical accounts by the generous gratitude that he expresses after relating each killing episode. After relating how Koyaga killed the lone Panther, the griot is brimming with appreciation: “Thank you ... and forever thank you, Koyaga, for avenging the hundreds of men who had their throats cruelly ripped out by the panther” (p. 73). The griot shows that the people of the République du Golfe owe Koyaga an eternal debt. Viewed in this light, the beast-killing myths serve as half-truths that legitimate Koyaga’s ambitions to be life president and the deification of Koyaga is a “masked discourse which conceals a real meaning behind the imaginary one” (Kearney, 1991, p. 66).

In Kourouma's artistic vision, the four mythical beasts that Koyaga kills are not only mythical, they may also be metaphoric representation of the four politically powerful men that Koyaga kills in order to attain supreme authority. The first to be dispatched is the incumbent President, Fricassa Santos. Earlier on, before his assassination, Santos shows complete confidence in the power of his magic:

There is not a single initiate in all Africa who has learned more than I about the mysteries of Africa ... If a soldier like Koyaga were to kill me tonight, it would mean that everything I have learned is sham, lies, that all the spiritual leaders have lied to me. It would mean that Africa itself is a sham, a lie; that all talismans and sacrifices are worthless. It is unthinkable, impossible. It cannot be true. (p. 99)

But Santos dies at the hands of a relatively young soldier, who is under the tutorship of a woman and a Moslem sage. Santos's death may be symbolic of the cultural loss that Africa suffered when colonial powers invaded her, and wreaked havoc with Africa's cultural institutions. The fact that all of Africa yielded to the invading forces of colonialism makes a mockery of the whole African belief system and resulted in a cultural crisis of an unprecedented scale which Africa is still reeling under. President Santos's death is prefigured in the death of the thousand-year-old Caiman of Gbeglerim at the hands of Koyaga. When Koyaga announces that he has come to kill it, it bragged: "I am as eternal as this land, as impervious to bullets as the mountain, as immortal as the river in which you are reflected. It is you, presumptuous hunter, who will die" (p. 78). Sadly, despite its half-day battle against death and its terrifying howls, the sacred caiman dies. As has already been argued, this may signal Africa's cultural loss, which despite the terrifying howls of a few scholars and traditionalists, the continent seems to have suffered in its violent colonial encounter with Europe. This encounter seems to have been culturally traumatic, and African culture would, from then on, remain shelved away in cold libraries and displayed in museums in the form of cultural artefacts to be viewed in bemused silence at a safe distance.

Of course culture does not literally die, but usually displays resilience by transforming itself into new forms that are compatible with the new forces. However, the harrowing nature of Africa's colonial encounter with Europe is symbolized by how awe-struck other animals are when they hear the dying howls of the sacred caiman. The narrator says: "For half a day among waves, the monster battles against death ... All the other animals which customarily come before nightfall to drink at the mere arrive and in silence witness the death of a monster" (p. 79).

If indeed the sacred Caiman is taken as one aspect of Kourouma's perception of Africa, it is clear that he does not have any idealistic views about her. Although the death of the caiman means the loss of thousand-year-old traditions, its elimination is as necessary as it is painful. Its regular need for appeasement and its vindictive nature when not appeased represent Africa's undesirable traditional cultural practices which had become irrelevant in the face of the industrial forces that had revolutionized life in some parts of the world. If this is not an over-interpretation of Kourouma's mythical narratives, it becomes clear that his views about pre-colonial Africa and its encounter with Western colonial forces are characterized by a high level of ambiguity.

Next to be eliminated by Koyaga are J. -L. Crunet, Ledjo, and Tima, the three men with whom he has been sharing power after the assassination of President Santos. In an attempt to show that the seeds of a one-man dictatorship were sown after the assassination of President Fricassa Santos, the griot turns to African idioms and proverbs:

Power is a woman who cannot be shared. In a herd, there can only be one male hippopotamus. What can be said, and foretold, thought of government with four leaders? Four is more than one; there are three too many! (p. 122)

Comparing European governance and that of Africa, "the man whose totem is leopard" (Mobutu Seseko, the late Zairian dictator) confides to Koyaga (Eyadema, the late Togolese dictator):

An African chieftain consults the counsellors he has appointed but is not required to follow their advice ... a true, authentic African chieftain disposes of everything in the coffers of the Treasury and the central bank, nobody calculates or controls what he may spend ... That [is] the style of government best suited for Africa. (pp. 277-278)

And indeed, Mobutu lived according to these principles, for it is said that he was richer than his vast nation of more than 50 million people, and his sons are said to have commandeered the national airliner for a vacation in America every weekend! That indeed seems to be the style of government best suited for Africa, for Africans are portrayed as unquestioning and having a tendency to elevate their leaders to the position of deities. As it is evident here, Kourouma's satire does not spare anybody, and even the passive African masses earn the wrath of his satirical pen.

Without trying to draw allegorical parallels between each beast that Koyaga kills and his four political opponents, suffice it to say that the satirist seems to have multiple uses for the mythical and other African oral techniques. It can therefore be argued that calling Koyaga "one of the greatest hunters among men" takes on a new meaning after reviewing the above information. He is indeed the greatest hunter and killer of men! The people of lesser social status that he killed in his long reign are captured in Maclélio's tongue in cheek comment after Koyaga has killed the four monster-beasts:

Not content simply to kill four monsters with your Remington magnum, monsters that had terrified the Paleo lands, Mr President and Supreme Guide, you killed, widowed and orphaned many antelopes, apes and boars ... it is impossible to list all the exploits of the *simbo-ne* that you are. (p. 79)

Indeed it is impossible to list all the people Koyaga killed during his long atrocious dictatorship, for some simply disappeared without any trace.

It is important to point out that Kourouma seems to use the term "beast" as an overarching metaphor, as the title of the novel suggests. This is seen from the advice

that Koyaga gets from Tiékoroni, (the Ivory Coast's Felix Houphoët-Boigny) "he whose totem is the caiman, the Man with the Fedora". Tiékoroni enumerates what he terms the four "most dangerous beast[s] that threaten a head of state and leader of one-party regime in Cold War independent Africa" (p. 221). The first beast Tiékoroni argues "is the insidious tendency at the outset of one's career to separate state coffers from one's own" (p. 222). "The second most dangerous beast which threatens a new head of state", [Tiekoroni] said, "- which threatens every politician as he embarks on his career – is the distinction between truth and falsehood. Truth is often merely a way of repeating a lie", Tiékoroni added (p. 224). "The third dangerous beast which threatens a head of state and leader of a one-party system is for the President to accept the men and women around him, those he meets or with whom he converses, at face value" (p. 227). Tiékoroni says the fourth "wild beast which threatens the leader of a one-party state [is] bad choices" (p. 232). One always has to choose the liberal camp of Western capitalism if one does not want one's people to starve in what he contemptuously calls the communist "bullshit ... dignity of the Negro". Of course, Tiékoroni's words are extremely satirical, but they also indicate how Kourouma uses the term "beast" or the phrase "wild beast" as a complex metaphor that permeates the whole novel.

Another view of myth not very different from what has been discussed above is presented by Carl Jung (1991, p. 9) who argues that myths are "a projection of the collective unconscious tendencies of society". Walter Burkert concurs, and sees myth as having reference to something of collective importance (p.13). The "collective unconscious" of the people of the République du Golfe reflects the need for physical and spiritual security which a dictatorial and paternalistic style of governance usually provides. In the same vein, the structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss argues that myths resolve contradictions or opposites that people in most societies have to contend with. For example the Koyaga beast-killing myths simultaneously portray him as killer/protector, cruel/kind, superhuman/human and so on. Myths reconcile and mediate between these extremes and function as a mode by which a society communicates and through which it finds a resolution between conflicting opposites (Levi-Strauss 1991, p. 14).

A different view of myth is presented by Nietzsche, who argues that myths originate from people's desire for power or negation of power. If one applies Nietzsche's interpretation to Koyaga's mythical birth narratives, his exploits as a youth and his heroism in the Indo-China war may be seen as discourses aimed at explaining his rise to power and his desire to consolidate his hold on that power. As has already been noted, the griot-narrator draws attention to a number of extraordinary events about Koyaga's birth, childhood and youth. For example, Nadjouma carried the baby Koyaga for twelve, instead of the normal nine months, and she "suffered in labour for a full week," instead of the usual one or two days. At birth Koyaga was unusually huge and powerful. The narrator says he had the "strength of a panther cub" and was "born as heavy as a lion cub" (p.16).

The exploits of the infant Koyaga are also narrated in sweeping magical and mythical terms. The narrator says: "Everyone knew ... the moment the mother freed herself of the childThe animals, too, realised that he who had barely seen the light of the day was destined to be the greatest slayer of game of all huntsmen" (p. 17). When Koyaga is born the world of nature feels perturbed, and tsetse flies attack the infant, who is said to have crushed the tsetse flies in fistfuls with his bare hands. The list of Koyaga's infant exploits is very long, but the paraphrase above is enough to illustrate the point that the griot is out to deify the living Koyaga for political expediency. These myths which are created by "praise singers, the army of sycophants, flatterers and toadies who furnish the ruler's court," are ideological instruments aimed at mystifying consciousness (Chenjerai Hove, 2007, p.1).

It is important, though, to draw attention to the satirical tone of the griot narrator who, on numerous occasions, distances himself from "the army of sycophants". This can be seen in the following quotation:

There is one among the great passions of your youth, General Koyaga, which is rarely mentioned in your official biographies. It is the passion you had for Fatima, a Moroccan prostitute in Indo-China. Your sycophants pass over this affair in silence. In the purification ritual of the *donsomana* we will deal with it at length.
(p.33)

Part of the strength of Kourouma's satire draws its power from this humorous attempt by the griot to distance himself from Koyaga's sycophants and praise-singers, when on numerous occasions he does exactly as they do.

The application of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory may show most of the mythical aspects in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* as disguises of the unconscious desires not only of Koyaga but of the society at large. Without reducing all myths to suppressed libidinal drives, as Freud does, the mythical aspects of the novel can indeed be profitably examined as pointers to various unconscious drives of the society. Let us take the stories of Tchao, Koyaga's father as an example. Tchao's personality embodies and represents the contradictions that a society which encounters the threat of foreign cultural domination experiences. But over and above that, the myths about Tchao can be read as projections of his society's unconscious drives. Tchao is a celebrated wrestler, not only among his Naked People of the mountains, but his fame has also spread to the plain tribes of Peul, the Mossi and the Malinke. Tchao seeks challenge everywhere he goes and his desire for thrills accidentally lands him in the French colonial army, where he finds himself in the malodorous trenches of World War I.

Interestingly, it is a linguistic misunderstanding that makes Tchao enlist in the French colonial army. In the Paleo language of the mountain people, to wrestle and to fight and to wage war share the same word. Tchao goes before the French commander to sign up for some great world wrestling championship to be held far across the seas and the French congratulate him on his patriotic spirit. This linguistic confusion dramatises the important role language plays in the construction of a people's worldview. Tchao is almost mortally wounded in the "great world wrestling championship" but he wins for himself, and by extension for his people, glory by being awarded the four greatest French military honours. It is noteworthy that it is the French who revived and nursed the almost mortally wounded Tchao back to health and decorated him as their hero. From then on, therefore, Tchao no longer belongs to his people. Once the cultural domination of the hero of the mountain people is complete, the French move in smoothly and swiftly to cap it by military conquest and political domination. The identity crisis that Tchao experiences after his discharge from the French colonial army leads to his painful and tragic death, and symbolically

stands for the destruction of the Naked People as a distinct and sovereign social group.

Tchao's story suggests that societies need heroes in order to bolster their social ego, and if they do not have them they will manufacture them because they are indispensable for the psychological well-being of the social body. The real or contrived hero is worshipped and deified for possessing the qualities that the society wants and admires, but may not have. On the other hand, the hero is both feared and hated because he has the capacity to become a Frankenstein monster which destroys its creator. Indeed, Tchao brings destruction upon himself and his people, supposedly by transgressing the ancestral custom of nakedness. However, the fact is that the hero is destroyed not for transgressing a long-standing taboo but for failing to live up to the Herculean role that the society created him for in the first place. The Naked People come to a realization that no matter how heroic Tchao is, he cannot save them from French colonial invasion.

Levi-Strauss argues that the human mind is created in such a way that it cannot tolerate contradictions, and the structure of society reflects the mind's need for harmony and resolution of psychological contradictions. Thus Tchao is a model, a reflection of the Naked People's perception of themselves, and the society cannot comprehend how Tchao, the wrestling hero, can fail and succumb so easily to French colonial and cultural domination. All along, through Tchao, the Mountain People have projected themselves as invincible. The society solves this unsettling psychological contradiction by viewing him as transgressing his society's taboos, and the whole community can now accept its painful defeat and subjugation by the French. The imprisoned and dying Tchao hints at this contradiction-resolution project to his little son Koyaga: "The terrible death I suffer is a punishment; it was effected by a curse, by the wrath of the spirits of our ancestors" (p.13). A few sentences later Tchao contradicts this explanation:

Perhaps, if I had not been mad enough, foolish enough to pit my strength against the greatest fighters in the universe, and especially to clothe myself, the Frenchmen would not have violated our refuges, would not have Christianised us. We might have postponed

being clothed only by a year or two. We would have done no more than defer our entry into the world, delayed our descent to the plains to cultivate richer soil, put off sending our children to school ... we would but have adjourned...but suspended ... some respite ... (p. 14)

Tchao's story, then, is the naked people's way of both communicating and finding a resolution for the unsettling contradiction that French colonial conquest brought to their world view.

The traumatising effect of the French colonial victory over the naked people is captured in Koyaga's comment about his father's death:

The image of my father in agony, in chains, in a prison cell will always be the central image of my life. Relentlessly, it will haunt my dreams. When I speak of it in some defeat, some ordeal, it will lay waste my strength; when it comes to me in victory, I shall become cruel, without the least concession or compassion. (p. 15)

If one takes the capture, torture and murder of Tchao as symbolic of what French colonial conquest did to the naked people; Koyaga's words can be interpreted broadly as pointing to the inescapable binarism that Africa's encounter with colonial invasion resulted in. European colonialism has been, and is likely to remain, the central image in the lives of most Africans who lived through or after that violent clash between Western culture and African culture. Viewed in this light then, the atrocities which are committed by post-colonial African dictators are mere reflections of the atrocities committed by European colonial rulers in Africa.

If Nietzsche's interpretation of myth as having been originally designed for the justification of attaining or refusing to accept power is correct, the marabout Bokano Yacocouba's mythical story becomes comprehensible. The spiritual puritanism of Bokano is described in broad and sweeping terms. For example, the narrator says: "As a marabout Bokano Yacouba was as complete as the trunk of a baobab and full as the *djoliba* at the height of winter" (p. 50). The griot depicts Bokano as possessing the

great talent of divination and being very different from the urban tricksters who only practice divination to make money for themselves. The griot says he has a quarrel with the fact that “Allah had bestowed on him, conferred on him, great and generous gifts which are his alone” (p.50). But later, when the spirit-possessed and motionless Nadjouma is brought for treatment by Kabore the nurse, the griot makes a very cynical and satirical observation about the supposedly generous gifts that Allah bestowed on Bokano: “The marabout’s exorcism was a simple, quick and effective technique: the beating, the battering, the thrashing varied little regardless of the patient” (p. 60).

In addition to his dubious technique of exorcism, Bokano is evasive when asked questions pertaining to his parentage and where he hails from; his answers are cryptic and enigmatic, showing that he is a person who knows more about the human psyche than about Allah. It is also interesting that it is the people themselves who endow Bokano with skills that he never claimed to have himself. The griot says: “People remarked that Allah seemed to have granted what Bokano prayed for with his beads and the word spread throughout the land. Pilgrims began to arrive from far and wide” (p. 55). Kourouma seems to be fascinated by how people create myths that project their own desires. Bokano was created and deified by the people themselves and what he did was merely to take advantage of his good fortune.

The fact that Bokano was an ordinary urban charlatan who had been made into a great marabout by the people themselves is further emphasized by what the griot calls his second contention with the marabout. Retreating into the use of proverbs the griot observes and advises: “When one does not wish to be touched by a monkey’s tail, one stays clear of the troop. He who would not be caught in many wiles stays clear of the villages and all human society. [But] Bokano lived in an encampment half an hour’s ride from Ramaka, the regional capital” (p.50). The argument is that one cannot achieve religious purity as long as one lives in a community of human beings. Bokano’s austere and puritan ways are soon tested by the pilgrims who “came with their arms laden with money and gifts” (p. 55). His determination to remain morally pure by avoiding sexual relations with his patients and former patients is quickly broken by Nadjouma, Koyaga’s mother.

This is what the griot has to say about Nadjouma's beauty and how it became a screen between Allah and Bokano's pious prayers:

In the name of Allah, Koyaga's mother was beautiful. A very beautiful human! She still had the firmness of her youth: her breasts swelled like budding mangoes in the first days of April; her muscles bulged, her buttocks had the shape and the feel of a cast-iron pot. (p. 61)

Indeed when one does not wish to be touched by the monkey's tail, one should stay clear of the troop! Soon, Nadjouma is living in Bokano's courtyard as the envied possessor of the sought-after aerolite and she becomes the marabout's personal executive assistant!

Viewed in the light of the above, Kourouma seems to be engaged in the process of deconstructing myths. In his extensive use of myth and the myth-like in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* he is not really engaged in demythicizing - an interpretation that completely separates myth from history – but he is doing what Paul Ricoeur calls demythologizing, that is, identifying the ideological abuse of myth as a false explanation of how things are. This, according to Ricoeur, will lead to an interpretation that affirms and appreciates myth's symbolic role as an exploration of how things might be (1991, p. 69).

At the beginning of this discussion it was argued that myth is bound up with tradition, transmission and reinterpretation of the past. Richard Kearney argues that myth also contains a utopian anticipation of the future (p.69). This has already been alluded to by Ricoeur's assertion that myth plays a symbolic role in exploring future possibilities of the human condition. The myth about the marabout Bokano clarifies the above ideas. When Bokano arrives in Ramaka with his disciples after journeying for an unspecified period, the narrator says the Muslims of Ramaka wished to learn his name; but the marabout and his disciples had no names. They had forgotten everything when Allah opened their eyes after being struck by divine lightning. When he is asked about where he comes from and where he is bound, he says that "he hailed from no place, he was bound for nowhere, [and] he was nowhere. Because the earth

he left behind, that upon which he travels and that he will be, are one and the same; the earth is a gift from Allah” (p. 52).

The marabout’s story is both backward looking and a utopian anticipation of the future. For example, humankind has been identified, separated and divided through the use of names, surnames and other titles designed to classify people into different and unequal groups. This is why the marabout ‘forgets’ his name, which is a rejection of a classificatory and divisive designation. Secondly, many wars have been fought in Africa and beyond for natural resources such as land, which may be the reason why the marabout says he comes from nowhere and is going nowhere. Bokano’s paradoxical statements allude to all the tribal wars that have been fought in many parts of Africa as a result of territorial disputes.

In addition, Bokano’s words also remind the reader of a more fundamental scientific truth: that the earth as part of a gigantic cosmological system is hurtling into infinite space, and that at any given time it is always in the middle of nowhere, and is probably coming and going nowhere in particular. Viewed from this lofty perspective, human quarrels and bloody wars over space and territory appear petty and absurdly comic. The anticipation of a future utopia in Bokano’s story therefore lies in his realization of the sad state of human affairs and his dreaming and anticipation of a world where humankind would experience true physical and spiritual freedom. This is a world where people would not be encumbered by the classificatory tags and prejudices that imprison the human soul. That is why Bokano creates a model township near Ramaka and calls it Hairaidougou (‘the village of happiness’).

However, Kourouma’s satire shows that Bokano’s utopian vision is far from becoming a reality in a dictatorship-infested post-colonial Africa. The next chapter of this thesis examines Kourouma’s nightmarish portrayal of post-colonial African dictatorial rule.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WHAT IS IT WITH DICTATORS? - A CASE STUDY OF THE SATIRICAL EXPOSÉ OF THE POST-COLONIAL DICTATORS IN *WAITING FOR THE WILD BEASTS TO VOTE*.

After relating how political power in the République du Golfe was divided among four leaders after the assassination of President Fricassa Santos, the griot mockingly observes: “In a herd, there can be only one male hippopotamus” (p.122). Most African leaders, be they civilian or military rulers, who took over power from the departing colonialists, seem to have completely subscribed to this extremely myopic and personalized view of political power. An example is the late life-president of Malawi, Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, who used to reject the need for political opposition by referring to the absence of opposition in heaven. He argued that God himself does not want opposition, as it is seen by his chasing Satan out of heaven (Goran Hyden, 2006, p. 99). The late long-serving president of Côte d’Ivoire, Felix Houphouët-Boigny, also declared: “Competition is healthy for sport, but in politics, what must triumph is team spirit” (Jackson and Rosberg, (1982, p. 152).

This political arrogance and attempt to exclude civil society from active political participation was even held by respected leaders such as the late scholarly Senegalese president, Leopold Sedar Senghor, who wrote: “The president personifies the Nation as did the Monarch of former times his people. The masses are not mistaken who speak of the “reign” of Modibo Keita, Sékou Touré or Houphouët-Boigny, in whom they see, above all, the *elected of God through the people*” (in Jackson and Rosberg, p. ix). Riding on the euphoric wave of nationalistic victories, these leaders were largely able to establish and legitimize their personal rule through such reference to a higher god whom they claimed sanctioned their rule. In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* Kourouma derides and satirizes these leaders’ quest to monopolize the control of state power by deflating their nationalist posturing through depicting them either as

vain and brutal self-serving clowns, or as misguided, preposterous, tyrannical ideologues.

In his portrayal of dictatorships that will be examined in this study, Kourouma seems to be in full agreement with John Dunn, who argues: “Good government is ... to be interpreted not in terms of the intentions of the rulers, which tend (at least professedly) to be excellent in most societies at most times, but rather in terms of the consequences of their rule for those whom they rule” (1986, p. 161). On how to identify true prophets from false ones Jesus, said: “By their fruits you will recognize them” (New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures Bible, Matthew 7. 16). In the post-colonial states that Kourouma depicts in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, he shows that the fruits of effective governance should be economic development, that is, the growth of the economy and improvement in the living conditions of all citizens. The failure to achieve economic development and the lack of respect for basic human rights and the sacredness of life in all the dictatorships depicted in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* are at the heart of the crisis of political accountability, and they are the subject of Kourouma’s merciless satire.

Although Kourouma examines different types of post-colonial governments, ranging from civilian nationalist regimes and imperial autocratic systems, to monarchical and military regimes, he seems intent on convincing the reader that when everything has been analyzed, as far as outcomes are concerned, there is no distinction between these forms of governments. Kourouma’s satire demonstrates that all of them “can readily be assessed in terms of their substantive achievements in office, and the precise nature of their constraints on goal-attainment” (Samuel Decalo, 1990, p.15). This study will therefore seek to show that Kourouma’s presentation of African post-colonial dictators in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* illustrates that legitimacy of most African governments, whatever their ideological complexion, is undermined by their economic failings and their heavily tainted record on human rights (Patrick Chabal, 1986, p.12). An examination of the dictators portrayed by Kourouma will reveal that a “satirist, though he laughs, tells the truth [and that a] combination of jest and earnest is a permanent mark of satiric writing” (Gilbert Highet, 1962, p. 233).

But first a general overview of post-colonial Sub-Saharan African political and economic governance may help to put Kourouma's satire on dictatorships into perspective. Between 1960 and 1979 no fewer than 59 heads of state – more than the number of countries in the continent – were toppled or assassinated. Only three retired peacefully between this period. Below is a table which shows how African leaders left office between 1960 and 2003.

How African Leaders Left Office, 1960-2003

Cause	1960-69	1970-79	1980-89	1990-99	2000-03	Total
Overthrown in coup, war or invasion	27	30	22	22	6	107
Died of natural or accidental causes	2	3	4	3	0	12
Assassination (not part of a coup)	1	1	1	1	0	4
Retired voluntarily	1	2	5	9	2	19
Lost election	0	0	1	12	6	19
Other(interim or caretaker regime)	6	8	4	14	1	33

Adapted from Goran Hyden, (2006, p.19).

In the light of the above, the following remark by the griot-narrator seems more than accurate: "Africa is by far the continent richest in poverty and dictators" (Kourouma, p. 440). Most governments that remained or were established after the 107 coups were what Max Weber calls patrimonial systems. In describing a patrimonial system Weber says: "The patrimonial office lacks above all the bureaucratic separation of the

‘private’ and ‘official’ sphere. For the political administration ... is treated as purely personal property ... The office and the exercise of the public authority serve the ruler and the official of which the office is bestowed; they do not serve impersonal purposes” (Weber, 1978, p. 1098-29). The personalization of state resources by the ruling elite resulted in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa “with a few exceptions, like Botswana, Mauritius, and South Africa, ... [sharing] the common fate of being the poorest in the world” (Hyden, 2006, p.1). In these countries over 40% of the population live on less than one U.S dollar a day, while as many as 75% live on less than two U.S dollars a day (*The Economist*, 2004). When it comes to infrastructure such as roads, excluding South Africa, the whole of sub-Saharan Africa has fewer paved roads today than Poland, one of the poorest member countries of the European Union (Hyden, p.17).

Readers familiar with African colonial and post-colonial history will readily realize that Kourouma’s dictators in *Waiting for Wild Beasts to Vote* are based on historical figures who are either given a different name or an epithet. Koyaga, who is the focus of the narrative and represents all the dictators, emulating all their excesses, whether in building palaces or suppressing opposition, is modelled after Gnassingbe Eyadema who was Togo’s president from 1967 up to 2005. Nkoutigui Fondio is Guinea’s Sékou Touré; Tiékoroni, “the crafty old man with the fedora”, is Côte d’Ivoire’s Felix Houphouët-Boigny; Emperor Bossouma is the Central Africa Republic’s Emperor Jean-Bedel Bokassa; the man of the leopard totem is Congo-Zaire’ Mobutu Sese Seko; and the man of the jackal totem is Morocco’s King Hassan II (*Complete Review*, 2007, p. 5).

Christiane Ndiaye argues that Kourouma’s presentation of these historical figures, albeit under pseudonyms or descriptions, creates problems pertaining to the level of fictionality of his work. What complicates the matter even further is that some of the European and African political leaders are in fact acknowledged by their actual names. This issue can be partially addressed by observing that although Kourouma is meticulous in presenting historical detail in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, his choice of facts is highly selective and slanted, and this is designed to suit his satiric purpose. All the dictators are invariably portrayed in a negative light, since it is their failures, vanity, atrocities, and not their positive deeds that are chronicled. Ndiaye

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sums up the debate on the fictionality of *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* by arguing: “What the reading of Kourouma reminds us is that every narrative is a construction, be it a narrative of the past events written by historians, a journalistic report on current events, an autobiographical narrative, or a story that provides a narrative thread of a novel” (2007, p.103).

In the light of the above, this study will not attempt an historical examination and evaluation of facts about the dictators that Kourouma presents. Rather it will focus on how Kourouma achieves his satiric purpose in his selective portrayal of the deeds of these rulers. Where parallel historical detail is relevant in elucidating Kourouma’s satire it will be cited. But it is worth noting that although Kourouma engages in a lot of fabrication in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, he is generally fair, and closely adheres to facts as he knew them in his presentation of some of the worst excesses of the post-colonial African dictators. Reading historical biographies of some of these dictators sounds more fictitious than Kourouma’s novel.

Kourouma’s narrative in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* makes it clear that the totems of the dictators are very important for the satiric purposes of the novel. For example, Koyaga is of the falcon totem, Tiékoroni is of the caiman totem, Bossouma is of the hyena totem, and there is the man of the leopard totem, and also the man of the desert jackal totem. Interestingly, certain powerful kingdoms in the Biblical book of Daniel are also likened to dangerous wild beasts. In a fearsome vision the prophet Daniel is shown huge powerful beasts coming out of the sea (in the Bible the sea usually represents humankind that is alienated from God). The first beast is like a lion, the second is like a bear, the third is like a leopard, and the fourth eludes all naming and is only described as “fearsome and terrible and unusually strong and [that] it had teeth of iron [and] was devouring and crushing” (The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures Bible, Daniel 7.2-7). Later, an angel interprets Daniel’s troublesome and fearsome vision: “As for these huge beasts, because they are four, there are four kings that will stand from the earth” (The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, Daniel 7.17).

Through their animal totems Kourouma’s dictators are also portrayed as embodying and exhibiting some of the worst characteristics of the animals after whom they are

‘totemed’. Like the real carnivorous beasts that cannot survive without eating the flesh of other animals, these leaders’ personal political power is gained and sustained through the elimination of all those who are opposed to their tyrannical dictatorships. Seen from this perspective, the title *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* becomes a pessimistic satiric commentary on whether the beastlike dictators can really embrace democracy after the end of the Cold War, which is symbolized by voting, with its prerequisite principle of respect for the sanctity of human life.

As has been noted earlier, Kourouma presents different types of post-colonial African dictatorships for the reader’s examination. The first type may be called a nationalist-socialist dictatorship. The second is some kind of liberal pro-Western dictatorship. The third type is an imperial militaristic dictatorship. The fourth may be termed a monarchical dictatorship. This categorization is merely meant to clarify the study of these dictators and is not necessarily indisputable. The study will argue that Kourouma presents these different dictatorships in order to persuade the reader to seriously examine the tragic nature of post-colonial African governance. But it will also argue that Kourouma’s satire enables the reader to see how individuals come to possess such vast and abusive power for decades in a world that professes democratic principles and respect for human rights and freedom. This reading will allow *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* to be interpreted as searing attack on the over-optimistic belief in the inherent goodness of human nature and the idea that humanity is relentlessly marching to a better and brighter future.

Summarizing Rousseau’s dream of an egalitarian society, Foucault says:

It was a dream of a transparent society, visible and legible in each of its parts, the dream of there no longer existing any zones of darkness, zones established by privileges of royal power or the prerogatives of some corporation, zones of disorder. It was a dream that each individual, whatever position he occupied, might be able to see the whole of society, that men’s hearts should communicate, their vision be unobstructed by obstacles. (1980, p.152)

In Kourouma's text, the socialist pan-Africanist and dictator Nkoutigui Fondio, also known as 'the Man in White' (Guinea's Sékou Touré) seems to have been initially motivated by Rousseau's ideas (which inspired the French Revolution), and by Karl Marx's socialism. His epithet, 'the Man in White', serves to emphasize the apparent purity of his intentions for his subjects and for Africa as a whole. On the occasion of his country's independence from French colonial rule, the satiric narrator has the following to say about Nkoutigui's speech:

The Man in White was forcefully stirred by the dignity of Africa and of the black man and before the world and into the face of General de Gaulle he bellowed a resounding 'No!' No to the Union! No to France! No to colonialism! The Man in White preferred poverty in freedom for the République des Monts rather than opulence in slavery. (Kourouma, p. 186)

Nkoutigui concludes his stirring, and probably at this point in time sincere, independence speech with a solemn and moving appeal to all black intellectuals to come and "join him in the capital of the République des Monts to build the first truly independent state in West Africa and avenge the Emperor Samory" (Kourouma, p. 186).

With the benefit of hindsight, one can see the extent to which Nkoutigui's independence speech is filled with both pathos and bathos, and how his vision of an independent Africa is anchored on presumptuous and preposterous ideals. The descent of the French Revolution into a macabre farce stood as a colossal monumental warning sign to those who would care to heed it on how even the best of human aspirations quickly become hijacked by power-hungry and self-seeking individuals. By the late 1950s, when African countries started to gain independence, the Stalinist atrocities of socialist Russia were already in circulation, and those who really cared about human dignity and effective governance could freely take a lesson from them. Kourouma's narrative seems to suggest that Nkoutigui should have realized the uphill task that faced him, especially without the human resources and the technical expertise that his country desperately needed.

The satire on Nkoutigui is intensified by the fact that his call for black intellectuals to come and build his independent country is only heeded by mediocre scholars like Maclédio. About Maclédio's credentials as a scholar the griot-narrator says: "Maclédio was making no headway with his thesis. The call by Nkoutigui Fondio was a godsend. It allowed him to return to Africa without having to complete or defend his thesis. He could step off the plane in the capital of the République des Monts with only his notes, without losing face" (Kourouma, p.187). With intellectuals of Maclédio's calibre, Nkoutigui's project of building a truly independent African state was doomed to experience a still-birth.

The results of Nkoutigui's daydreams start to manifest themselves in the intense hunger and abject poverty on the part of his subjects. These breed political discontent and Nkoutigui feels compelled to use torture and have propaganda machinery that was not even heard of during colonial times. It is in the Ministry of Information (a euphemism for Ministry of Propaganda) that Maclédio is employed: "The greater part of Maclédio's job consisted of contriving words, lies, cynicism and eloquence to provide rational justification for actions which had none because they were directly inspired by the geomancy or marabouts" (Kourouma, p. 189). Kourouma scores the most satiric points by showing the chasm between Nkoutigui's lofty ideals and rhetoric, and the real outcome of his dreams and subsequent tyrannical conduct. Despite the fact that the République des Monts is declared a socialist state guided by rational and scientific principles, Nkoutigui has daily recourse to traditional African practices of marabouts, sacrifices and grigri.

Before long Nkoutigui is seen building a cult of personality around himself. He demands that his subjects call him Supreme Leader and decrees that his drab and uninspiring poetry, which he scribbles on his insomniac nights, be the only books that are "read, studied and critiqued in the schools, institutions and universities of the République des Monts [and that] after each of the three daily news bulletins, the presenter on the Radio-Capital of the République des Monts read a number of verses by the Supreme Leader" (Kourouma, p. 194). Sékou Touré, after whom Nkoutigui is modelled, is said to have written over twenty published volumes containing his speeches and reflections on Guinean and African development. After pointing out that Touré's was one of the most despotic regimes in independent Africa, Jackson and

Rosberg, writing in 1982, observe: “Rulership in Guinea is the story of Touré’s fanatical devotion not only to his political beliefs, but also to his personal power; it is also the story of political conflicts and economic difficulties that have arisen in an attempt to impose the dogmas of a self-styled philosopher-king” (pp. 208-9).

The griot-narrator also shows that Nkoutigui was fanatically devoted to his personal power through portraying himself as an all-round talented and all-knowing hero. The narrator says:

In his socialist republic, Nkoutigui was known as the greatest footballer, the pre-eminent doctor, the finest farmer, the most excellent husband, the greatest and most pious Muslim, etc. Of these adulations, those he liked best were those which dubbed him the most talented writer and his country’s finest poet. (Kourouma, p. 194)

Later, Maclélio is almost tortured to death for preferring Senghor’s poetry over Nkoutigui’s, illustrating how drunk the dictator is with delusions of personal power. Commenting on Touré’s attempts to deify himself, Jackson and Rosberg say: “He is an authority in all matters, from philosophy to agriculture, which he has pronounced in his numerous writings and speeches” (p. 212).

The targets of Kourouma’s satire are prophet-presidents such as Nyerere of Tanzania, Nkrumah of Ghana, Touré of Guinea, and some people may even argue that Mugabe of Zimbabwe completes the quartet of the “visionaries” who ruined the economies of their countries by leading tyrannical personal regimes based on the conceited belief that their ideas were and are infallible. When their economic experiments fail these leaders are quick to shift the blame to imperialists, neo-colonialists and other economic saboteurs who are too scared to see a superpower emerging out of Black Africa. The starving people of the République des Monts who flock as refugees into Tiékoroni’s liberal camp, the République des Ébenès, are a clear testimony that Nkoutigui’s political aspirations cannot be easily reconciled with economic considerations. Kourouma’s satire seeks to show that Nkoutigui’s political economics and political power, grounded on ideological faith rather than on economic analysis,

will never work; instead they will lead to persistent economic difficulty which makes a mockery of his regime.

The satiric narrator also seeks to show that Nkoutigui's desire of dignity for blacks is untenable in poverty, since poverty increases rather than decreases dependence. Poverty also threatens his power since it increases chances of political agitation. In order to maintain his grip on personal power Nkoutigui quickly turns his socialist state, "the Land of Negro dignity", into a veritable prison where real or suspected conspirators are routinely rounded up and thrown into Camp Kabako, where they are forced to confess to crimes of high treason under diabolic torture. Most of these prisoners end up dead as Nkoutigui is goaded on to make human sacrifices by Boukari, a marabout-shaman who deserts Tiékoroni's capitalist camp and rallies to the "cause of scientific socialism for the dignity of the black man" (Kourouma, p. 199). The rest of République des Monts remains "dilapidated as a leper's hut", with the exception of the torture chamber at Camp Kabako, which has "all the benefits of high-tech installation and ultramodern equipment" (Kourouma, p.191).

Kourouma seems keen to show that the socialist camp of Nkoutigui and the pro-Western liberal camp of Tiékoroni are different but in name. Nkoutigui and Tiékoroni are similar in that both passionately subscribe to the ideology of self-interest. Their main preoccupation seems to be concentrating power and wealth in their hands. Brian Titley argues that "the centralization and personalization of power are the key features of African neo-patrimonial regimes" (1997, p. 207). Patrimonial regimes derive their power and legitimacy from tradition, but since the authority of Nkoutigui and Tiékoroni seem to rely on their charismatic revolutionary credentials and patronage rather than on genuine appeal to tradition, their regimes may be described as neo-patrimonial. Nonetheless, both Nkoutigui and Tiékoroni try to appeal to tradition in an attempt to legitimize their power. Nkoutigui claims to be the grandson of Samori Touré, the great West African Emperor who heroically resisted French colonial invasion and evaded capture for sixteen years. Tiékoroni also claims ancestry from the great Cissé kingdom and another well-known tribal chief called Sika Kourou. Tiékoroni first manipulates his traditional connections to gain power, and subsequently uses them to legitimize his dictatorial rule.

In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* the neo-patrimonial dictatorships of Nkoutigui and Tiékoroni are portrayed as less extreme in their abuse of human rights than the military dictatorships of Emperor Bossouma and Koyaga. Nevertheless, the basic point that the novel seems to be making is that all personal rules are founded in violence and are characterized by high levels of corruption, which lead to underdevelopment. For example, through luck and the patronage of the West, Tiékoroni is able to build a relatively prosperous economic system, and through repression his regime achieves some measure of political stability, to the extent that all the starving people of West Africa seek refuge in the République des Ébenès. However, Tiékoroni is the same dictator who advises the newly crowned Koyaga never to separate state coffers from his own, and he himself lives by his advice. Soon after attaining the highest office in the land he gives himself boundless plantations which “were tilled, planted maintained and harvested at the expense of the state” (Kourouma, p. 223). While holding by far the largest fortune in the republic, Tiékoroni is exempt from taxation.

Tiékoroni’s clientilism knows no bounds; “from the State Treasury funds, the dictator made each of his parents, his friends and his servants rich as the princes of an oil rich country in the Gulf of Arabia” (Kourouma, p. 212). From public funds, he even builds a personal city with a basilica in his home village of Fassou. In fact Houphouët-Boigny constructed a city in Youmasokouro, his home village, made it the capital city of Côte d’Ivoire, and crowned it with one of the biggest churches the world, a basilica that cost U. S. \$300 million. The city was largely unoccupied during much of the dictator’s reign and the basilica only filled up twice to capacity, when the Pope John Paul II commissioned it and during the funeral service of Houphouët-Boigny (Titeley, p.213). In order to put this grotesque figure that went into the construction into perspective, it should be pointed out that the GDP of most of the poorest countries in Africa is less than half that amount. This and many other examples in the text show that the targets of Kourouma’s satire are tyrannical dictatorships that lack any legal or moral constraints on the exercise of power, leading to power being wielded in a completely arbitrary manner, according to the impulses of the ruler and his agents.

On a moral level Tiékoroni advises Koyaga never to separate truth from falsehood. In order for Koyaga to be a successful dictator he must, according to Tiékoroni, establish

a conscienceless and efficient propaganda apparatus that will repeat lies until they become the incontrovertible truth. Tiékoroni slyly observes: “Truth is often merely a way of repeating a lie” (p. 225). Going further with his unsolicited advice, Tiékoroni tells Koyaga never to trust anyone if he wants to be a successful dictator and a president for life. Tiékoroni himself has Saoubas Prison, where his friends, his supporters, his nearest and dearest are held. He explains the rationale behind his apparently malevolent behaviour: “It is a rule universally acknowledged that one can only be betrayed by a friend or relative. We anticipate betrayal; flush out the false friend, the jealous relation ... It is a process as complex as cleaning the anus of a hyena” (p. 229).

Furthermore, Tiékoroni acknowledges that he tortures, exiles and assassinates his political adversaries. The dictator loves violence and inflicting pain on his victims, to the extent that he has a chair in the torture chamber of Saoubas Prison where he sits enthroned during the torture sessions. Hyden notes that tyranny “is marked by a particularly impulsive, oppressive, and brutal rule that lacks elementary respect for the rights of person” (p. 99). This brutality seems to emanate from a severe feeling of insecurity and a chronic and unsettling vulnerability which most dictators appear to suffer from, which they then illogically try to appease by the mindless and inexplicable torture of their real or imagined enemies. It was seen earlier how Nkoutigui capriciously imprisoned and brutally tortured his friends and relatives to death at Camp Kabako.

In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* the prison becomes a constant feature that characterizes all the dictatorships and comes to symbolize death and the cruel nature of the dictators’ regimes. In these post-colonial African dictatorships the prison is not for common criminals, but an indispensable instrument through which dictatorial rule can be exercised and maintained. Kourouma shows that these dictators commit all their cruelties not for any noble ideals but first and foremost to protect their personal rule which enables them to freely plunder the nation’s resources. It is in this light that Hyden argues: “These rulers are not concerned with the transaction costs – what they do is allowed to cost as much as is necessary to remain in power” (p. 105).

As has already been noted, Kourouma also presents personal military dictatorships for the reader's examination and assessment. Emperor Bossouma (Bokassa of the Central African Republic), Koyaga (Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo), and the man of the leopard totem (Mobutu of Zaire) are all military usurpers who have neither nationalistic revolutionary credentials nor any claim to traditional authority. Nevertheless, Kourouma is keen to illustrate that they share a lot of characteristics with the civilian regimes examined above. For one, they all appear to invariably subscribe to the ideology of self-interest, the centralization and personalization of all political power in their respective countries. However, due to the fact that they gain power through violent military means, the challenges that they face and the methods that they use in trying to legitimize their rule are somewhat different from civilian dictators who get power through charismatic revolutionary leadership or genuine appeals to traditional power. Their legitimacy is far more problematic and their methods of maintaining personal power more brutal and bloody. Nevertheless, the basic point that Kourouma's narrative seems to be making is that all personal authoritarian regimes are violent and lead to the suffering of innocent people and to the destruction of African economies.

Kourouma's satire on the military dictatorships of Bossouma, the man of the leopard totem and Koyaga, seems directed at the optimism with which military take-overs were greeted in the 1960s and 1970s following the failure of civilian governments to deliver on their independence promises. Some political scientists such as Samuel Huntington propounded what they termed organizational theories – “attributing to African armies certain characteristics of professionalism, nationalism, cohesion, austerity – all impelling them to move into the political arena to rescue the state from the grip of corrupt, inept, and self-seeking political elites” (in Decalo 1990. p. 3). This view was further fanned by the fact that from 1957, when Ghana became independent, up to 1990, apart from Mauritius in 1982, no elections had ever ousted a ruling party from office in independent Africa.

In his portrayal of the aforementioned military rulers, Kourouma appears bent on showing that military rulers do not have any purer motives of effecting national development and genuine social amelioration programmes than their civilian predecessors. Instead, “the army moves into the presidential palace with no blue prints

for social policy, little expertise in development administration, and certainly no control over levels of foreign and technical assistance” (Decalo, p. 26). In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* the intellectual deficiency and lack of any plan on how to develop their countries is dramatized in Koyaga’s journeys of initiation. All the dictators that Koyaga visits after his coup fail to offer him any tangible social policy, and not one of them promises the newly-crowned president expertise in development administration or technical assistance. Koyaga returns to his country a thaumaturge in state plunder, violence and repression of his people’s political expression.

A good starting-point for illustrating the ideas articulated above about personal military rule is the Emperor Bossouma. In his depiction of Emperor Bossouma, Kourouma seems to invite the reader to examine the fundamental behavioural dynamics that motivate coup-plotters, instead of assuming that most coups in Africa are a result of the failings of civilian governments. The narrator in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* makes it clear that Bossouma’s coup was a straight-forward seizure of power, instigated by vanity and ambition. Bossouma is hopeless as a leader, and only rises to the rank of colonel and chief-of-staff on the sole merit of his uncle president thinking him too stupid to attempt a military coup and succeed. The president is right in his character assessment of his nephew, for “on Saturday nights, the chief of staff is regularly picked up on the streets of the city in a state of inebriation” (Kourouma, p. 243). The idea of a coup is not Bossouma’s, he is just led on by a much junior officer, Captain Zaban, a highly intelligent and ambitious officer whom the opportunistic Bossouma later cruelly tortures and kills upon attaining the highest office in the land. His subsequent socially sterile administration is a clear indication of his opportunistic nature and character deficiency. Emperor Bossouma is only able to transform his country into an arena for his flights of imagination, wish-fulfilment and self-gratification (Decalo, p. 18).

Kourouma portrays Emperor Bossouma as an individual who suffers from grand delusions of vainglory and ambition. This is seen in his pursuit of the highest military rank amongst all the military dictators of post-colonial Africa, which culminates in his coronation as emperor. The griot-narrator satirically observes:

He seized power the following Monday as colonel. On Tuesday morning, he awarded himself the rank and stars of a general. When he was advised that there were four other dictators of that rank on the continent, he declared himself field marshal on Thursday evening. When two other generals joined him as field marshals, he requested that France, together with his army and his people, crown him emperor.... Since that time, no other dictator has attained the dignity of emperor. (Kourouma, p. 244)

Commenting on the vain ambitions for glory of Marshal Jean-Bedel Bokassa, the leader of Central African Republic after whom Emperor Bossouma is modelled, Brian Titley says: "He wanted to outdo his contemporaries in grandeur and rank. There was only one title that could accomplish this beyond doubt – emperor" (p. 91). The reader would wish that Kourouma's narrative was mere fiction, but alas Bokassa did indeed crown himself emperor at a staggering cost of U.S. \$22 million in 1977. Later on, after his coronation, Bokassa told journalists that the Pope and African heads of state that turned down the invitations to grace the occasion did so out of jealousy! Probably he was right.

The griot-narrator sarcastically observes that Emperor Bossouma is at least less dishonest, and less hypocritical than the other dictators whose lives are just as imperial as that of Bossouma but still insist that they are presidents of democratic republics. Bossouma is honest, too, in admitting the brutality of his imperial regime as is seen in his starting Koyaga's tour of his country from the prison. To Koyaga, Emperor Bossouma himself candidly admits: "The most important institution in a one-party state is the prison. It is with the prison that I will begin our tour of the Empire" (p. 249). Bossouma is also generous and brutally sincere with his wisdom in repression and abuse of human rights. Advising the new dictator, he says: "To be effective, a good African prison needs not two death cells but a dozen. In Africa, you have to cover the entire country with prisons and recruit experienced prison governors" (Kourouma, p. 250).

Bossouma's other flights of imagination include the relocation of the UN headquarters to Awakaba, one of the most extensive, most game-rich safari parks in

the world, found in his country. He hopes to achieve this by constructing a private hotel at the park for each head of state and attributing a hunt to each one of them. He hopes that this will one day persuade them to unanimously vote for the relocation of the U.N. to his country. Bossouma can afford all these dreams when the salaries of civil servants are many months in arrears. It is also interesting to note that while the U. N. that he wants in Awakaba Park stands for peace and respect for human rights, the park itself is established through violence and cruelty. Villagers are violently evicted to make way for the park, and those who are forced by hunger to venture into the park are given worse treatment than that given to persons accused of high treason. This is seen when on the occasion of Koyaga's touring the park with the Emperor they stumble upon starving villagers who are clustered around the remains of an elephant. Bossouma personally shoots dead one villager and orders that the rest should be transported to Ngaragla Prison and their village razed to the ground.

Kourouma makes it clear that Bossouma's preoccupation with "remaining the highest-ranking soldier in the Cold War multifarious Africa" and his other delusions are not just harmless vainglory. His schemes cost his country and subjects dearly. It becomes apparent then that Bossouma has plunged into politics devoid of any lofty political ideals, but has merely grabbed the opportunity thrust upon him by good fortune to indulge in every one of his base desires and ambitions. Hyden observes that "personal rule is highly opportunistic [and that it is] inherently authoritarian" (p. 102).

Kourouma's unflinching satire deflates Bossouma's rhetoric and dreams by juxtaposing them with the real physical conditions in *des Deux Fleuves*. The peace, security and justice and the upliftment of people from poverty and disease that he yearns for, as seen in his U. N. wishful project, stand in complete opposition to the conditions in Ngaragla prison, a place that stinks of "a mixture of death, disease, urine, [and] excrement", where innocent citizens are tortured to death. In his pursuit of ultimate power, Bossouma abandons all self-control and sends "to prison – to their deaths - all who [fall] into his hands. His former enemies, their families and friends of his enemies. Everyone he dislike[s], their relatives and their friends. Former conspirators and future ones. Former communists and future ones" (Kourouma, p. 252).

C. Ake argues that military rule is inherently firmly grounded in violence, since it promotes a culture of intolerance and disregard for consultation and dialogue. He argues: “The ascendancy of the military is one of the tragedies of Africa, for the military is nothing more than a highly specialized apparatus of violence whose salience begins when sociability has become impossible and civilized values no longer apply, when we take to the ‘killing fields’. That is why military rule is an inherently and inevitably de-civilizing” (1995, p. 244). The debased life and violent nature of Emperor Bossouma, Koyaga, and the man of the leopard totem are clear testimony to Ake’s description of military rule. But the point that Kourouma seems to be making throughout *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is that all personal post-colonial African regimes are tragedies to Africa since they are also invariably violent and decivilizing.

Kourouma’s narrative seems to suggest that military dictatorships are the culmination of all savagery and barbarism. For example, instead of reflecting organization, professionalism and respect for rank and hierarchy that African armies were once thought to be models of, Bossouma’s military regime is unpredictable and arbitrary. This can be seen more clearly in the irrational actions and decisions of Emperor Bokassa, after whom Bossouma is modelled. Bokassa is reported on one occasion to have instantly promoted Second Lieutenant Francois Bozie to the rank of general after he hit a Frenchman who was showing disrespect to the Emperor! On another occasion, visiting a large business one evening, Bokassa found that only the janitor was on duty and immediately appointed him director of the firm! In another case, Bokassa was so pleased with the services of a nurse that he promoted her to a doctor!

In Kourouma’s narrative the temperamental nature of Bossouma’s character and the arbitrariness of his rule are captured in the incident involving the appointment of Otto Sacher as governor of Ngaragla Prison. Bossouma and Sacher meet each other by chance, and within minutes “the Emperor, on the spot, gave him the highest position which can be conferred upon a Whiteman, a position which, hierarchically – after the Emperor, the Empress and heir to the throne – was the fourth highest in the land. A position which outranked the position of Prime Minister” (Kourouma p. 252). The two instant airport marriages that Bossouma engages in also show that his rule is based on the dictator’s impulses and feelings, rather than on careful planning.

Bossouma lives up to his advice, for Ngaragla quickly overflows with political prisoners soon after his coup d'état. In addition to deriving satisfaction from personally supervising the torture of his prisoners, Bossouma seeks financial gain from the plight of his unfortunate victims. From ex-ministers he has imprisoned he confiscates a twenty-six kilometre stretch of plantations and has prisoners plant cassava on it. The cassava tubers from these and other of his plantations are dug up by prisoners, sold to the state in order for it to feed the very prisoners and, tax free, Bossouma pockets all the profit. Through this callous profiteering, the Emperor is able to project himself as a good father of the nation who even kindly prevents traitorous prisoners from starving to death. Hence the title of Father of the Nation serves a real and practical purpose for the dictator, as Titley observes: "As a father, [the dictator] could be severe or lenient, even indulgent, as [his] mood dictated" (p. 45).

Kourouma's satire reaches all the way to those who sponsored the existence and longevity of the brutal personal dictatorships. For example, Bossouma is able to enjoy all the flamboyance of power, not only through his brutal methods of getting rid of any opposition and other ritualistic tricks designed to legitimize his dictatorial regime, but also through the patronage of the French government and other oppressive and dictatorial African regimes which bankroll his corrupt government. France does not only sponsor such bizarre projects as the costly coronation of Emperor Bossouma, but provides regular grants to offset the budget deficit of Pays aux Deux Fleuves which emanate from its government's gross mismanagement and the Emperor's unchecked plunder of the country's resources for self-aggrandizement and that of his family and close lieutenants. Bossouma also confides to Koyaga that his futuristic Awakaba hotel projects will be funded by the South African government which had already committed itself to the deal. In fact, historical sources indicate that not only France but South Africa and Libya propped up Bokassa's imperial regime financially in the Central African Republic/Empire in the 1970s (Titley, p. 67). Kourouma's satire therefore attacks human greed in that it appears as if these foreign governments were willing to sacrifice the future of millions of the Emperor's starving and oppressed subjects, as long as some leading government officials could easily access ivory and other resources they needed from this small and impoverished nation.

Brian Titley interprets Bossouma's costly and absurd coronation as emperor and the other grandiose schemes that he engages in as a search for legitimacy by a military leader who increasingly feels embattled and vulnerable due to his lack of personal charisma and revolutionary credentials (1997, p. 208). He therefore goes to the extreme of appropriating symbols and rituals in an attempt to bestow some measure of respectability on his regime. While Titley's theory is useful in explaining the dictators' almost impulsive and extreme appropriation of symbols and rituals, it fails to account for the apparently heartless pleasure which most of the dictators, be they military or otherwise, seem to derive from the torture of their real or merely imagined enemies. Bossouma, for example, is not content with imprisoning or even the summary execution of Colonel Zaban, who is in Ngaragla Prison for supposedly plotting against the Emperor. The sardonic griot-narrator says: "Before he died, the Emperor wanted the colonel to have drunk his urine, eaten his faeces – that was the rule" (Kourouma, p. 248).

As for the villagers who are caught pillaging the cornfields and cassava fields of the imperial court, they have their ears and hands cut off Islamic-style, before the Emperor orders his guards to beat them to death. In fact, historical accounts indicate that Emperor Bokassa had thieves routinely dismembered, and one such event which led France to plot the overthrow of the Emperor was Bokassa's personal participation in the brutal beating to death of school children, some as young as eight years, for participating in a march demanding the abolition of the uniform requirement in schools. The school uniform requirement had been promulgated by the shrewd dictator in order to benefit the Empress, whose company had a monopoly on the manufacture of these uniforms.

The extreme anger and brutality of Bossouma (Bokassa) is difficult to explain as a mere attempt at personalization of power and as a mere desire to accumulate wealth. The only explanation that the satiric griot-narrator is able to provide for these abuses that defy all human logic is a simple yet profound adage: "Only he who has never wielded power believes that it is unpleasant" (Kourouma, p. 205). Kourouma's satire on dictatorships in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* seems to invite the reader to apportion most of the blame and responsibility to the political actors themselves. They

are portrayed as free moral agents who consciously and actively pursue an evil course with the intention of maximizing their personal power and perpetuating their tyrannical rule with little opposition. As has been argued Kourouma blames the rulers themselves for the poor state of affairs in the post-colonial dictatorships that he depicts in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*. However, Jackson and Rosberg argue:

It is apparent from historical evidence that African rulers and other leaders are not captives of their environments: they have intervened, sometimes decisively, in the public life of African states, making some economically and socially unpromising countries orderly and some otherwise promising countries disorderly and insecure. (1982, p. 3)

In other words, Kourouma's unforgiving satire serves to show that human agency is a critical variable in the development or lack of development of post-colonial Africa. In addition to the satirization of the idiosyncrasies of individual dictators, Kourouma's satire acknowledges the constraints and uncertainties posed by Africa's colonial legacy and by foreign economic and political factors over which little if any control can be exercised by these leaders. But even over such constraining and overarching factors, Kourouma's satire shows that a balanced and not an overzealous commitment to one's whimsical ideas may alleviate the intensity of economic desperation that characterize the lives of people in most of the dictatorships portrayed in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*. For example, despite running an oppressive political regime, Tiékoroni is depicted as a pragmatic economist who spares his subjects the vagaries of extreme poverty which ravage Nkoutigui's utopian socialist state.

Concerning the failure by most Africa's post-colonial governments to achieve any significant economic growth, Jackson and Rosberg argue: "In African countries governance is more a matter of seamanship and less one of navigation – that is, staying afloat rather than going somewhere" (1982, p.18). An examination of the portrayal of the man of the leopard totem (Mobutu of Zaire) and the way he governs the République du Grand Fleuve testifies to the accuracy of the above observations. There is little governmental or even public organizational rationality in the administration of the République du Grand Fleuve. Kourouma's satire on the man of

the leopard totem hinges upon the dictator's publicly declared selfless motives and his subsequent actions, which clearly contradict these motives, the expected positive developmental outcomes of his rule, and the real state of bankruptcy that he plunges his vast and resource rich country into through his pursuit of an excessive course of self-aggrandizement. As John Dunn argues, it seems as if Kourouma's satire is aimed at showing that "a very large proportion of the worst that has happened to Africa has happened as a result of foolish or vicious political choice" (1986, p. 160). The griot-narrator does not mince his words in pointing out that the poverty and under-development that characterize the République du Grand Fleuve is as a result of the vicious political choices, or rather personal choices, of the man of the leopard totem. The narrator exclaims "Ah, Tiécoura! The man whose totem is the leopard was a potentate. Of the worst, the most criminal [kind]" (Kourouma, p.260). Due to his gargantuan and voracious appetite for accumulation, his subjects commonly refer to him as the "Thieving Dinosaur".

However some political scientists, such as Stanislaw Andreski, suggest that the corruption that has characterized most post-colonial governments should not be blamed on the flawed personality of individuals; rather he argues, it should be blamed on Africa's traditional past systems of clientilism and patronage. He argues: "There are very few saints ... especially in cultural systems where the rise to eminence of one individual triggers an obligation to provide for the welfare of the entire kinship group" (in Decalo 1990, p. 23). Kourouma's narrative also alludes to the negative legacy that some traditional systems bequeathed to the personalities of some individuals who became leaders in the post-colonial setting. For example, the man of the leopard totem comes from a tribe that glorifies criminal behaviour. The narrator says: "The future dictator's tribe, the Ngandi, one of the Bangala peoples ... favoured the qualities of thievery, lying and courage ... The man whose totem is the leopard was courageous enough to know how to lie and thereby steal more effectively" (Kourouma, pp.267, 272).

While there is no question that African traditional systems were far from perfect, the griot-narrator makes it clear that although character formation is a result of the interplay of nature and nurture, ultimately the individual has free will and should be made to account for his or her actions. A case in point is the man of the leopard totem

who enters politics by accident; he uses it to obtain money which he needs to support his life of debauchery. As a student in Brussels he becomes a mole for the colonialists and the CIA by infiltrating native nationalist movements. With his keen eye to making money he grasps the opportunity of becoming the personal ruler of the République du Grand Fleuve when it presents itself. His desire for absolute power is only matched by his love for accumulating wealth without being accountable to anyone. His accidental entry into politics and his subsequent mercenary attitude upon becoming the dictator-president of the République du Grand Fleuve lends support to the following observations by Jackson and Rosberg: “Politics in most Black African States ... are personalized and less restrained, resulting in higher stakes but also in greater risks for those who actively engage in the political game and greater uncertainty for the public” (1982, p. ix). Indeed, the man of the leopard totem personalizes the resources of his vast nation. He is able to weather the turbulent politics of his country and is rewarded, or rather he rewards himself, by ending up as “one of the richest men in the universe” (Kourouma, p. 296). Of course, the general public pays the highest price as a result of its docility by living an uncertain life, since in the République du Grand Fleuve soldiers are rapacious and enjoy a virtual licence to steal (Kourouma, p. 295).

Most actions of the man of the leopard totem can therefore be understood to be guided by his insatiable desire to accumulate wealth. For example, the adoption of “authenticity as a form government” is designed to bring maximum benefits to the dictator by giving him exclusive political power. Mocking and slandering Emperor Bossouma for mimicking Europeans by appropriating such titles as emperor, the man of the leopard totem counsels Koyaga to employ authenticity as a basis of his government. He reasons:

The decisions of an emperor had to be ratified by the electorate; those of an African chieftain did not. An African chieftain consults the counsellors he has appointed but is not required to follow their advice. An emperor’s spending is constrained by a budget; a true, authentic African chieftain disposes of everything in the coffers of the Treasury and central bank, nobody calculates or controls what he may spend. An emperor is constrained by the laws; a true African chieftain shows mercy, nothing more. (Kourouma, p. 277)

Acknowledging the observations of the man of the leopard totem, Jackson and Rosberg note: “To be ruler in many African countries has been to enjoy very nearly unlimited legal competence” (1982, p. 25).

Describing Mobutu, after whom the man of the leopard totem is modelled, Jackson and Rosberg argue that he was a severe and ravenous despot “totally dedicated to self-enrichment” (p. 169). In Kourouma’s narrative, the man of the leopard totem lives in obscene opulence with “perpetual celebration” following him everywhere he goes. While he can afford a fleet of five aeroplanes every time he travels, his “country has no roads, no hospitals no aeroplanes, no ... no [everything]. Doctors no longer heal for want of medicine and because their salaries are many months in arrears” (Kourouma, p. 292). This seems to confirm Sandbrook’s view that “personal rule is a symptom of underdevelopment” (in Hyden 2006, p. 100). According to this view, the multiplicity of personal rulers in post-colonial Africa is a manifestation of underdevelopment, but it is also a consequence of the principles of plunder which invariably constitute all personal regimes as they are seen in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*.

The man of the leopard totem uses a combination of methods which include patrimonialism, prebendalism, clientilism and pure force and coercion in order to stay politically afloat and continue his unchecked pillaging of state resources. But the end result is not entirely unexpected. One morning, when the man of the leopard totem has been in power for exactly twenty years, “the balance sheet is in the red, utterly in the red” (Kourouma, p. 291). His solution to his quandary does not come entirely as a surprise, for it is a tried and tested method of African dictators who have often found themselves in similar situations: he completely deregulates the mining industry and allows a free-for-all situation. Fortunately for him, this stratagem temporarily cools down the tempers of the agitated masses, giving the man of the leopard totem a new lease of life to continue his navigation, still going no-where in particular.

Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire did indeed nationalize all private foreign-owned companies and completely deregulated the mining industry in 1973 when he found himself politically beleaguered as a result of gross government mismanagement,

profiteering and waste. Although this farcical publicity stunt by an African despot failed to bring its much vaunted national development, for him it was completely successful. It allowed the tyrant to appear as an omnipotent loving father of the nation who was able to solve the country's economic woes by a single stroke of the pen. Hyden observes: "The idea of acquiring foreign-owned property to redistribute to members of the politically elite therefore, was one way of placating clients who otherwise would be restless and prove a threat to the head of state" (2006, p. 97). President Robert Mugabe used the same ruse in 2000 when he found his political fortunes waning very rapidly. He seized all the white-owned farms, ostensibly in order to correct a colonial land ownership imbalance by equitably redistributing the land to the poor and landless peasants. Of course, as facts have revealed, most of the farms ended up in the hands of the political elite, a situation that Mugabe embarrassingly and publicly admitted. The chaos, suffering, and food shortages that resulted from this despot's method of clinging to power are testimony that Kourouma's satire on dictatorship will remain very relevant for quite some time. Kourouma's satire seems keen to show that political authoritarian regimes are not as secure as they appear, hence the use of a multiplicity of legitimating tricks that inevitably end in violence and repression.

Turning to the man of the desert jackal totem (Morocco's King Hassan II), Kourouma portrays a monarch that is different but in name from the rest of the "freedom-butcherers" in the multifarious African continent. Kourouma's satirical representation of a vicious monarch suggests that there are no easy solutions to Africa's leadership crisis. As a white Muslim the potentate of the jackal totem stands in complete contrast, at least superficially, to the dictators of Black Africa who are lampooned as "unpredictable and disreputable" Negroes in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*. Moreover, what makes him a better candidate for humane and effective governance is that he is monarch "of a dynasty which held power for hundreds of years in a centuries-old kingdom, and not some NCO who took advantage of the assassination of an innocent head of state ... who had promoted himself to general and proclaimed himself head of state" (Kourouma, p. 297).

However, Kourouma's satire undercuts the reader's expectations by showing that, whatever their complexion, "systems of personal rule are strongly marked by a desire

for personal power – one might even say a love of power” (Jackson and Rosberg, p. 38). As it turns out, “the dictator, his totem the jackal, was as medieval, barbarous, cruel, mendacious and criminal as all of the Cold War fathers of nations in Africa” (Kourouma, p. 298). When his personal power is endangered he plunges the country into a murderous and bloody religious civil war by playing Muslim religious prejudices against those of Christians. He fans “a great war with the most modern weaponry, a bloody war, a war which [is] economically disastrous, a war which [brings] impoverishment” (Kourouma, p. 308). The inhuman political choice that the king makes shows that he is only interested in personal power, he wants to stay politically afloat at whatever cost to his country.

The king’s resemblance to all the other dictators who are depicted in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is also accentuated by his brutal and bloody reprisals on the two occasions of failed coups. The king justifies his cold-blooded actions by reference to his divine right to the throne. The griot-narrator says:

The King declared that Allah had ‘placed him on the throne to safeguard the monarchy’, and reminded the people that ‘to safeguard it ... I will not hesitate if necessary to slaughter one third of a population who harbour such destructive ideas, in order to preserve the two thirds who are sane’. He had the conspirators face the firing squad and had their wives, children, brothers and sisters locked up in the fort in secret, without trial and for the rest of their lives. (Kourouma, p. 305)

Kourouma’s satire on dictatorships in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* emerges as a moral injunction aimed at persuading the reader into carefully analyzing the basis of his or her thinking about politics in post-colonial Africa, and then with guarded optimism think about the link between effective leadership and economic development in a post-colonial setting. Kourouma’s satire also shows that brutal personal rulers and post-colonial Africa’s dependence upon the developed world are realities that have to be confronted with honesty, sobriety, and a scrupulous contemplation of the constraints and hazards that ensnared preceding generations.

Kourouma clearly rejects the atrocious rule of post-colonial African dictators with abhorrence. Nevertheless, his satire does not naively endorse the democratic movements that sprang up all over Africa after the end of communism in the former USSR as a panacea for post-colonial Africa's problems. The final chapter of this thesis interprets Kourouma's satirization of these democratic agitations as a satirical rejection of all supposedly ideal solutions to human problems.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DEMOCRACY: A SATIRICAL REPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN POST-COLONIAL DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS IN *WAITING FOR THE WILD BEASTS TO VOTE*.

Matthew Hodgart argues that the most challenging, dangerous and rewarding topic for the satirist is politics, and further observes that "there is an essential connection between satire and politics in the widest sense: satire is not only the commonest form of political literature, but, insofar as it tries to influence public behaviour, it is the most political part of all literature" (1969, p.7, 33). So far, the examination of Kourouma's satire in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* has shown that although satire "takes, for its province, a whole society" (Ngugi, 1969, p. 56), it is the political issues that are central to his satiric attacks. In recognition of the above fact, this thesis has tried throughout to marry literary theory with political theory in its examination of Kourouma's satire.

It is with this understanding that satire is, among other things, primarily political in nature, that Kourouma's satirization of the post-Cold War sub-Saharan African democratisation process will be approached in this chapter. The chapter will focus mainly on the last forty-five pages of Kourouma's *Waiting for the Wild Beast to Vote*, a section of the novel which strongly concentrates on the post-1989 sub-Saharan African democratisation process. The year 1989 marked the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of communism in the former USSR. These events had powerful political, economic and social effects in Africa, since they heralded the end of the Cold War and everything it stood for. In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, Kourouma shows that the post-1989 democratisation agitations in Africa were partly caused by these political changes in Europe. Although Kourouma's satire focuses only on the democratisation of Koyaga's République du Golfe, this thesis will attempt to show that his satire "transcends the occasion ... and makes us see that a single instance of stupidity, personal or communal, can represent much more than itself" (Brown and Kimmey, 1968, p. 6).

Since the term "democracy" is often used to signify different political systems by

different people, it will be very helpful to indicate the context in which it will be used in this chapter. In this thesis a political system will be regarded as democratic if "it facilitates citizen self-rule, permits the broadest deliberation in determining public policy, and constitutionally guarantees all the freedoms necessary for open political competition" (Joseph, 1999, p. 240). Abdoulaye Souley points out that in post-Cold War sub-Saharan Africa, democracy was expected to transcend its political confines and "free people from the yoke of asphyxiating and economically unproductive authoritarian state[s]" (1999, p. 67), which had been established immediately after the departure of the European colonizers. In post-1989 Africa, the democratic process was therefore expected to achieve a dual function; a political one and an economic one. Kourouma's satire in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* becomes a powerful instrument through which he examines causes that trigger, and reasons that lead to, the collapse of the democratisation process in the République du Golfe.

Kourouma makes it clear that the post-1989 democratisation wave in the République du Golfe was caused and sustained by a complex and dynamic interplay between external and local forces. However, central to Kourouma's satire is the satiric narrator's emphasis on the inseparable link between the demand for democracy and the way Koyaga had ruinously managed the economy of his country for more than three decades. The griot-narrator shows that the extravagant feast marking Koyaga's thirtieth year as a civilian-cum-military dictator dealt a fatal blow to the economy of the République du Golfe, which had been consistently plundered by greedy politicians from the inception of independence up to the end of the Cold War, when resistance against political corruption began to grow. The narrator shows that the economic collapse was also accelerated by a culture of indolence within the masses that authoritarian rule seems to unintentionally foster through its costly legitimization gimmicks such as the thirtieth anniversary feast. The narrator exclaims:

Ah, Tiécoura! The thirtieth anniversary feast was magnificent. After the interminable procession, the civil servants and workers from the public and private companies were tired and did not go to their offices next day. In the fields and the villages, they awarded themselves two weeks' holiday. They did not think of their jobs

again until the end of the month, until payday. A surprise awaited them. They could not believe their ears when the financial directors told them there was no money to pay the salaries. (Kourouma, p. 400)

The satiric narrator shows that Koyaga has led his nation to complete bankruptcy. According to Nicolas van de Walle, "by the late 1980s more than half the nations of sub-Saharan Africa were effectively bankrupt, and most of the others were propped up by Western public capital" (1999, p. 135). Souley concurs: "In most cases, the beginning of the democratic process coincided with the period when the African states were already ruined, in debt, sucked dry" (1999, p. 68). To the ordinary people, Koyaga's personal dictatorship becomes synonymous not only with political repression but also with misery and economic ruin. Arguing for a link between collapsed economies and the widespread demands for democratisation in Africa, Emeka Nwokedi notes: "Mass protests against military dictatorships and the one-party state would never have occurred at the time they did if the economic situation in the sub-Saharan states [had been] strong or at least, promising and not weak, declining and, in fact, dead in some instances" (1995, p. 50). This situation leads to a narrow-minded conceptualization of democracy which Souley terms "bread-and-butter democracy" (1999, p. 68). This is a situation where citizens are demanding democratic change primarily for economic reasons, and not for increased constitutional rights.

This situation can be seen in the République du Golfe, since the democratisation process is partly triggered by the empty state coffers. Upon finding their bank accounts empty on payday the people ask their union leaders to seek an audience with Koyaga. The griot-narrator shows that for most of his corrupt and oppressive thirty-year-rule Koyaga's regime has survived with the support of Western public capital. Confronted by the hungry and agitated masses and the empty treasury, Koyaga attempts to resort to his tried and tested source of financial help, the French government, only to find that due to the end of the Cold War, the rules of the game have completely changed. Kourouma's satire seems to suggest that Koyaga had a free hand in determining the economic future of his country through the manipulation of Western powers during the Cold War. But once the Cold War ended, and Koyaga had

plundered the economy of his country, his hands become tied, for he could not expect the unconditional financial support he enjoyed for most of his reign, because the West no longer needs dictators in its political programme.

Capturing the self-centred nature of Western politics discussed above, and showing how African dictators have reduced their countries to pawns in the struggle between world's super powers due to their dependent status, the French ambassador explains to the begging Koyaga:

During a summit of heads of state at La Baule, the President of the French Republic, President Mitterrand, had advised African leaders to change their policies, to cease operating as dictators and become saintly democrats. France has used this speech as an excuse, as a cut-off date for ceasing its automatic payment of the salaries of the public servants in the French-speaking dictatorships in which the treasury is unable to meet payments. France requires that the dictator first sign an SAP with the IMF. (Kourouma, p. 401)

What the French ambassador tells Koyaga is indeed an historical fact. Addressing heads of states at La Baule on 20 June 1990, the French President dwelt at length on democracy as a universal principle, and affirmed that France would tie its future development assistance to the efforts made by the state concerned in favour of greater freedom (Nwokedi, 1995, p.184). Kourouma's satire works by pointing out the glaring inconsistencies and hypocrisy displayed by the twists and turns of French foreign policy as it is captured in Mitterrand's speech. The griot-narrator shows that for over three decades during the Cold War, and when it favoured French interests, democracy as a universal principle was never mentioned to the dictators who enjoyed unlimited power, with the financial support of the French government and other Western world powers.

Viewed from this perspective, Kourouma's satire seems to suggest that the imposition of democratic notions by the Western nations does not emanate from these countries' good will and the desire to see African people freed from oppressive and economically sterile personal dictatorships. Rather, it is an instrument through which Western powers perpetuate their economic, cultural, and political stranglehold on

Africa. The above view is shared by Nwokedi, who argues: "A focus on rationales and political calculus necessarily situates the reform process [African democratisation] within the banal struggles for the control of political power even as the ideals of democracy are professed" (1995, p. 2). It is this duplicitous self-serving nature of both Western democracies and African dictatorships that Kourouma's satire seems eager to expose in the last section of his novel. Such a reading of Kourouma is supported by Brown and Kimmey's observation that satire is "sustained attack on the hypocrisies and insincerities of a society" (1968, p. 4).

The satiric narrator in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* makes it clear that the demand by Western nations for African dictators to institute democratic reforms is closely linked to changed global circumstances, rather than these nations' desire to uplift the majority of Africans from poverty and unshackle them from the bondage of oppressive regimes. The insistence of the French that Koyaga sign a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which inevitably entails a lot of suffering for the ordinary people, with the local representative of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), suggests a lack of genuine concern for the people's welfare. Capturing the dire social and economic consequences of such an agreement with the IMF, the griot-narrator says:

Everything must cease, everything must be stopped, cut short or pruned, simplified or abandoned, given up or sacrificed, shut down or relocated ... Cut backs on teachers, nurses, women in childbirth, newborn babies, schools, policemen, sentries and presidential guards. No more subsidies for rice, sugar, milk for babies, cotton, and bandages for the wounded, tablets for leprosy and those with sleeping sickness. Construction of schools, roads and bridges, dams, maternity clinics, health centres ... must be sacrificed. No more further help for the blind, the deaf ... Reduce the workforce, close down companies, etc. (Kourouma, p. 402)

In the above quotation, the object of Kourouma's satire seems to be the exposure of the suffering that the implementation of an SAP would cause for the ordinary people in the short and medium term. Kourouma also seems to suggest that even the envisaged long-term benefits of a programme that causes such large-scale suffering

to the common citizens are far from being guaranteed. This is more so since African economic prospects depend largely on such unpredictable factors as the capriciousness of dictators, ever-changing international relations and the weather. Kourouma's satire of the imposition of SAPs upon African dictatorships implies that he holds the conviction shared by a number of African scholars and analysts that "capitalist imperatives are ever present [in the West's dealings with Africa] and override democratic imperatives" (Adji in Chabal, 1992, p. 70). The griot-narrator in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* repeatedly shows that before the collapse of communism in the former USSR, Western democracies and their donors encouraged and supported authoritarian, single-party regimes in Africa, since doing so favoured their political and economic agendas (Bayart, 1984).

Notwithstanding the above, the griot-narrator makes it plain that Koyaga and his fellow African dictators share a huge responsibility for the collapse of African economies, which then result in the inevitable dependence of Africa on Western powers for financial help. For example, in the novel Koyaga apparently gives France and other developed countries a free hand in determining the economic destiny of his country through the irresponsible manner in which he manages the economy during the favourable years of the Cold War. Addressing Koyaga about his political predicament during the early phase of the democratisation process, the griot-narrator says:

Until now, [the introduction of SAP] things in the République du Golfe had been bipolar and clear; everything that happened was resolved, worked out, played out between two parties. The authoritarian state and the submissive populace. At the summit, you, the arrogant dictator, your army, your party, your chiefs and your spies. At the bottom, the peasants stupefied by their faith, their poverty, mute, patient. Murderous, emasculating, contemptuous dictator that you were, you had declared yourself anti-communist and enjoyed the full protection of the West. The people had no allies but corrupt, voluble politicians, dishonest priests, marabouts, shamans. (Kourouma, p. 403)

Kourouma's satire effectively shows that, be it in dictatorships or democratic

processes, the losers in any struggle for political and economic control are always the common people. Acknowledging the vital role of human agency in local and global historical dynamics, Earl Conteh-Morgan observes:

Human beings and the structures they create and perpetuate over time are not mere links in some global chain reaction, or better still cogs in some worldwide clocklike superstructure, but are socio-cultural engineers. Patterns of domestic and international politico-economic and social relations develop, change, and persist because human beings create, modify, adapt, and evaluate these patterns. (1997, p. 176)

Conteh-Morgan's emphasis on the active role humans play in determining the course of historical events seems to fit into Kourouma's satiric project in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* in general, and the last section of the novel in particular, for Kourouma's satire seems to have "its origin in a state of mind which is critical and aggressive [about] human absurdity, inefficiency or wickedness" (Hodgart, 1969, p. 10). Commenting on the incongruity of African dictators' efficient methods of holding on to political power while they completely fail to adopt economically vibrant systems, Richard Joseph says: "Although these statist systems, capitalist or socialist, civilian or military, were economically inefficient, politically they were quite effective in maintaining their regimes" (1999, p. 252).

The satiric narrator in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* seems keen to show that personal authoritarian rule is an economically expensive political system which ultimately leads to the polarization of the nation. The griot-narrator consistently demonstrates that during much of Koyaga's thirty-year rule he maintained his power through an economically disastrous system of patronage and clientilism which required him to corruptly reward the army, his senior party members and all others who contributed to the longevity of his regime. All this was done at the expense of peasants and other voiceless sections of society. The situation which obtained in Africa as a result of the economic mismanagement of the dictators is accurately captured by Nwokedi, who observes: "The state became bankrupt in sub-Saharan Africa even as its managers grew richer; but the political personnel who presided over its destiny at the highest levels did not see the necessity to draw the right conclusions

from this predicament, and to take personal responsibility" (1995, p. 49).

The griot-narrator in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* shows that Africa's chaotic and often violent democratisation process in the early 1990s was closely linked, not only to the ineffective leadership, but also to the multifaceted relations which Africa still shared with her erstwhile colonial masters. Most political analysts are agreed that Africa's independence from colonial rule was largely a change of flag, since European countries continued and still continue to exercise a lot of influence in almost every sphere of African life. Richard observes:

At the time of Africa's "first independence," except in a few instances as in Guinea in 1958 where the French pulled out abruptly, departing colonial powers had a strong hand in devising representative structures. Once the decision was made to withdraw, however, they devoted more attention to the retention of desired economic, diplomatic, and security arrangements than to the operation of new governmental institutions in accordance with constitutional and democratic principles. (1999, p. 246)

Pointing to the inconsistent nature of the relationship between African countries and their former colonial masters, which the griot-narrator in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* shows contributes to the failure of democracy to take root in Africa, Conteh-Morgan argues: "The African state is plagued by the pull of the colonial past" (1997, p. 161). In Koyaga's case this pull is seen in his implicit trust in the advice of the very colonizers whose regimes had been labelled as oppressive and opposed to the economic development of the black majority. This was also seen earlier in Koyaga's almost instinctive action of running right into the now unwelcoming hands of the French for financial support after plundering the economy of his country to a standstill. Conteh-Morgan argues that the mutual attraction between the African dictators and their erstwhile colonial masters is inevitable because of the similarity of colonial rule and post-colonial African forms of governance. He observes:

The authoritarian character of many African governments is a residue of the nature of colonial rule itself. All European colonies in Africa were operated as police states in which various forms of

opposition were brutally suppressed, and indigenous populations were subjected to control by the most intrusive security establishment. (1997, p. 94)

In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, French post-colonial hegemony in the affairs of the République du Golfe is satirized by Koyaga's unquestioning application of the ill-devised educational policies dictated by the West. Addressing Koyaga, the griot-narrator says:

As soon as you took over power, your white advisers instilled in you the notion that the salvation of the fuzzy-wuzzies could be gained by imposing literacy on the masses. They told you time and again that an educated people was a developed people. You believed them ... From your earliest days in office, you had a primary school built in every village and encampment. (Kourouma, p. 404)

The irony of the whole situation is, of course, that Koyaga's "educated" people do not bring development but almost topple him from power during the democratisation disturbances of the 1990s.

What intensifies the irony about the failure of the democratisation process in the République du Golfe is that while Koyaga blames himself for planting the seeds of democracy through his ill-advised mass educational programme, some political theorists claim that democracy cannot take root in Africa because of the high rates of illiteracy and lack of active participation by a large section of the citizens in the political affairs of these countries. For example, Celestin Monga argues that the "rate of political illiteracy per citizen in each country ... [is] too high south of the Sahara for one to be able to form stable democracies" (1999, p. 78). While it may be true that literacy and the involvement of the majority of the citizens contribute to a strong democratic culture, Kourouma's satire shows that there is more to the failure of the democratic processes in Africa than is explained by the "democracy prerequisite" theories. Most of these prerequisites for the establishment of a stable democracy were propounded by 19th century thinkers like Stuart Mill, Alexis de Tocqueville, and by the 20th century political theorist Samuel Huntington, and have failed to pass the test of academic scrutiny, since democracy has been shown to have many varieties and to

be paradoxical in nature. For example, centuries old Western democracies have been thriving, even as large sections of their citizens remain passive and indifferent to political participation.

The satiric narrator in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* shows that a combination of factors, ranging from misappropriation of state resources, open abuse of power, right down to the naive application of half-digested social and economic programmes at the behest of the West, have all contributed to the eventual collapse of all aspects of organised life in the République du Golfe. Mocking Koyaga for his mass educational programme which he now blames for the democratization fervour that is threatening his personal dictatorship, the griot-narrator says: "You could not possibly have imagined that from the forest of the trees you planted through education would come the wild beasts which would destroy you" (Kourouma, p. 404).

What intensifies the satire in Koyaga's case is that his mass education programme does not only fail to stimulate development, but also creates dangerous social misfits who almost bring down his regime. Talking about the social misfits produced by Koyaga's ill-advised education system, the griot-narrator says they "are ready for anything, willing to stop at nothing. They have no morals, no scruples" (p. 405). The griot-narrator shows that an expanded educational programme has to be matched by a similar growth in the economy in order to absorb those who are churned out by the education system. Koyaga's corrupt dictatorship fails miserably to display imaginative leadership, and instead focuses all its energies on the unchecked plundering of state resources, engaging in the most callous abuse of human rights.

Interestingly, the narrator makes it clear that those who give Koyaga's regime headaches are not the most educated per se, but rather an amalgam of the 'unschooled,' the 'mis-educated' and the 'over-educated' who find themselves strangely united by economic necessity. The griot-narrator in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* emphasizes the role of this internal factor in the democratisation agitations that rock the République du Golfe in the early 1990s. The narrator says:

Those who had been tossed into the streets by the ill-conceived educational system were joined by the young workers driven out of

offices and factories by closures, cut-backs and business restructuring. It was this diverse group, who had learned from bitter experience, from injustice and lies, who - when the bell signalling the leap from dictatorship to democracy tolled - took the reins of the République du Golfe and of ancient Africa, the cradle of mankind. (Kourouma, p. 405)

The bell that tolled, signalling the leap from dictatorship to democracy that the narrator refers to, is the end of the Cold War. The point that Kourouma seems to be making is that the mass protests against Koyaga's dictatorship would not have occurred at the time they did if the economy of the République du Golfe had been strong at the end of the Cold War. The fact that the narrator says that the bell signalling the beginning of democracy was tolled, implies that while the domestic context is pre-eminent in understanding the processes that let loose the pressures for democratisation in the République du Golfe, it is doubtful whether these forces would have been as widespread and powerful as they turned out to be if the international context had not been particularly fortuitously and favourable (Nwokedi, 1995, p. 51).

The opportunism and the lack of high moral principles embedded in African political practice is emphasized by the behaviour of the diverse group that takes the reins of the democratic process once France and other Western powers have made it clear that they are no longer willing to financially prop up Koyaga's economically ailing dictatorship. The narrator also indicates that the strange composition of this group ultimately plays a crucial role in the failure of the whole process. About one section of this mixed assemblage, the 'unschooled' or *bilakoros*, the narrator condemningly observes:

In the beginning, they and the unemployed youth worked in the services of the party, in the service of power. It was they who sang the praises to the father of the Nation, took the foulest jobs of [Koyaga's] tyrannical regime ... They who were the pickpockets in the markets and on buses. They who robbed and killed ... At the first breath of democracy, they threw aside their jobs and devoted all their energies to the revolution to hasten the fall of dictatorship, the birth of democracy. (Kourouma, pp. 405-6)

The narrator's description of the characters that constitute the so-called democratic front automatically renders the whole process an unsustainable travesty. For the returning émigrés, the democratic process has to do with self-enrichment and getting their lost positions and privileges back. The *bilakoros*, on the other hand, see democracy as an antidote to all their daily economic problems. In the end, the whole process falters because “the democratic forces” quickly realize that “it is easier to proclaim multiparty elections and organise them than it is to create jobs and increase wages, scholarships and retirement pensions” (Souley, 1999, p. 68). As it turns out, the spendthrift leaders of the democratisation process fail to induce the *bilakoros* and other economically disadvantaged sections of the République du Golfe society to postpone satisfaction of their pressing material needs to the indeterminate future while economic and political restructuring is being implemented. The corruption and the self-serving spirit of the leaders of the democratic process accelerate people’s loss of confidence in the whole programme. Furthermore, the economic situation of the vulnerable groups worsens during this period as a result of the Structural Adjustment Programme, which is driven by market-based strategies rather than by welfare imperatives.

The difficult economic situation before and after the implementation of the SAP makes the majority of people in the République du Golfe participate in bread-and-butter democratisation agitation. The griot-narrator makes it clear that it is not the more abstract ideals of democracy that make these people join the democratic fray. As a result, when the democratisation process fails to provide immediate solutions to their daily problems they “wish they had the authoritarian regime of the past back again” (Souley, p. 68). Kourouma’s satire seems to be grappling with the problem of discovering “how a democratisation process that gives rise to the expression of more political demands can be reconciled with the scarcity of state resources” (Souley, p.68). He also seems to be contemptuous of a democratisation process which finds it easy to proclaim a lot of theoretical edicts but fails to address real issues that touch people’s lives, such as the creation of jobs and the general reconstruction of the country’s economy which for years has been plundered by Koyaga’s cruel dictatorship.

It is in fact the combination of unfulfilled expectations of economically

disadvantaged groups, the loyalty of the army to the dictator, and the tactical blunders of the leaders of the "revolution," which enable Koyaga to bounce back to power. Addressing Koyaga about this favourable change in his political fortunes, the griot-narrator says:

Your popularity is restored. Around the palace, the streets leading to your private residence are constantly crowded. Night and day beggars and sycophants, singers, dancers, cripples and *bilakoros* rub shoulders ... The economic crisis, exacerbated by the social unrest, had drained the country, making money scarce so that life became increasingly difficult for the poor. And all these little people were now beginning to long for the time of dictatorship. The *bilakoros* began to repent, the poor to weep. Opposition newspapers were forced to curb the bitterness of their slurs and insults towards you.
(Kourouma, p. 434)

Nwokedi believes that, more than any other factor, the African economic situation had a huge influence on the course and outcome of the democratic processes of the African countries south of the Sahara. He observes: "The problem is that democratic transition within the region has been motivated by, and realized (for cases of completed transitions) under distressed economic conditions" (1995, p. 226).

Commenting on the possible consequences of the failure of democratic transitional governments to address economic problems that confront the formerly dictatorial nations, Earl Conteh-Morgan says: "Citizen confidence in a new democracy is bound to dissipate if the regime is incapable of providing a modicum of economic security for its citizens. The consequence could mean political instability, compelling the military to intervene" (1997, p. 138). True to Conteh-Morgan's observations, in the République du Golfe the economic scandal of the National Conference does not only lead people to develop a hostile attitude towards the leaders of the democratic process, it also brings the wrath of the military upon the transitional democratic government.

It is in this light that Kourouma's satiric narrative emphasizes the responsibility of the local players who purport to be the vanguard of the new democratic era for the

failure of the democratisation process in the République du Golfe. When Koyaga's hand-picked deputies are forced by both international and internal pressure to pass legislation for multiparty systems and multiple unions, the griot-narrator says that the Ministry of the Interior becomes a hive of activity: "Crowds of people jostle, asking permission to set up new political parties, other unions, different newspapers" (Kourouma, p. 407). The satiric narrator seems to be of the opinion that the usurpation of this democratic instrument by power-hungry intellectuals marks the beginning of the end for the République du Golfe's democratisation experiment. He humorously quibbles:

They were advised that they were far removed from the reality of life in Africa and could in no way be said to represent all the provinces, tribes and the ethnic groups of the country. They retorted that, day and night during their long exile, they had lived with those realities and had filled themselves to the brim with humanism and universalism, and were therefore capable of a penetrating insight into all Africa and of legitimately representing all of the ethnicities and the regions of the République du Golfe. Peremptory and sure of themselves, they accredited one another. There were up to three delegates in a family, father, mother and son. (Kourouma, p. 424)

In the above words, Kourouma's satire condemns the arrogant, predatory and opportunistic nature of these intellectuals. He shows that those who succeed in forming these new organisations are an educated elite that has been living in France for most of Koyaga's dictatorship, and that these are people who are largely alienated from the reality of life in Africa. As soon as these individuals, who are in fact "teachers, doctors, lawyers, [and] engineers" (Kourouma, p. 423), are in the République du Golfe, they found "scores of organisations: philanthropic, political, sporting, professional and religious; countless non-governmental organisations intended to spearhead development" (Kourouma, p. 423).

In a damning critique of such organisations, Monga says: "Everywhere, these associations have been weakened by their intrinsic superficiality, by the opportunism of their leaders and by the lack of historical depth of the events to which they refer" (1999, p.79). The life of self-indulgence and flamboyance which

these individuals subsequently lead upon becoming members of the National Conference, while the masses are reeling in poverty, is clear testimony that they are not as philanthropic and national development oriented as they profess to be. The griot-narrator shows that they only form these numerous organisations to enable them to access power, since they share only episodic identity with the population they claim to represent.

It is in the light of the above that the intellectuals who have spent most of Koyaga's dictatorship in French exile and suddenly join the democratisation fray get a large portion of Kourouma's derisive satire. With the advent of democracy, these individuals return to the République du Golfe and quickly "take over the leadership of the revolution." About intellectuals of this kind, Souley has the following scathing comment: "Many African intellectuals have rallied to the democratic movement, not because they have really been won over to democracy as a political ideal, but because they see it as an opportunity to attain power by overthrowing those in power" (1999, p.68-9). In other words, they see democratisation as a launch pad for gaining control of the state, and as a result of their superior education they become the majority members of the Sovereign and National Conference which Koyaga is compelled to accept by the Western powers and their donor community.

Right from the inception of the Sovereign and National Conference, these "black French executives" engage in "a democracy of exclusion and humiliation" (Souley, 1999, p. 69). At the beginning of the conference, its members assign themselves the ridiculous task of putting Koyaga's thirty years of dictatorship and assassination on trial. The griot-narrator mocks the trivial-mindedness of these intellectuals by showing that the course that they are taking is a stumbling block to the democratic cause and that it is an outrageous waste of valuable time. He observes:

They began with the testimony ... they accused [Koyaga] of cannibalism and furnished proof. To enhance his life-force through ritual and sorcery, Koyaga ate and roasted testicles of his murdered opponents every morning for breakfast. Tales which tried the imagination, tales beyond belief. They bored the international press and made them sceptical. You have to know when to stop. Once you have said that the anus of the hyena smells bad, you have said it all

... For six whole months, the delegates vented their fury with lies.
(Kourouma, p. 426)

Furthermore, the griot-narrator indicates that nothing good could be expected from these individuals who become leaders of the democratic process since they harbour destructive bitterness and animosity against Koyaga for forcing them out of power, and out of the country after his bloody military coup. Addressing Koyaga about the composition of the top leadership of the Sovereign and National Conference, the griot-narrator observes:

The president and all members of the board were chosen from among those who had suffered at the hands of the dictatorship. Men blinded by resentment and the fires of vengeance. People whose minds were closed to any possible compromise with the Supreme Guide. Between you, Koyaga, and these people had come deaths, these were people with whom you could not, would not enter into talks. (Kourouma, p. 225)

Koyaga's unhelpful attitude and the malicious actions of the delegates of the Sovereign and National Conference seem to contradict the project of democracy. Democracy involves not just competition, but equally conciliation and accommodation, and it as an instrument not of vengeance but of resolving conflicts within human groups.

The Sovereign and National Conference alienates itself completely from Koyaga, who is still president of the country with the full backing of his loyal army, and it also fails to persuade the rich Western powers to provide it with financial support. The elite composition of the National Conference, and the fact that its members award themselves hefty daily allowances, make its estrangement from the ordinary people complete. In a country where the average wage is 30,000 francs a month, and a soldier's pay is 20,000, members of the provisional assembly give themselves European allowances of 60,000 CFA francs a day.

The satiric narrator emphasizes the collapse of the new forces of democracy into the mire of corruption and self-indulgence, and this makes the reader empathize with

the deep pessimism of such thinkers as Nietzsche, who expressed severe doubt as to whether reason will ever prevail in human political affairs. Freud also expressed reservations about the ability of human society to move beyond the limitations of the past (Booker, 1994, p.14). In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, this failure to move beyond the limitations of the past is dramatized by Koyaga's oppressive and violent rule that is portrayed as being rooted in an inescapable binarism with the colonial past. Also caught in this binarism are members of the provisional democratic government. Upon attaining some measure of political power, they become indistinguishable from the corrupt and self-indulgent dictatorship of Koyaga.

Kourouma's satiric narrative suggests that it is the excesses of members of the provisional government, their confrontational attitude towards Koyaga, and their failure to co-opt the military into their ranks, which leads to the demise of the democratic process in the République du Golfe. Emphasizing the pivotal role the army plays in a one party state, Conteh-Morgan says: "The military which could be viewed as a bedrock of coercive instruments within the state [must be] taken seriously in any ongoing distribution of power" (1997, p. 138). It is the naïve disregard of the army by members of the provisional government that the griot-narrator seems to be laughing at when they are held hostage by the army and are forced to abandon their democratic reforms. The griot-narrator mocks: "An abortive assembly. An assembly without power or means! The assembly was a sham which had appointed a provisional Prime Minister and elected a government" (Kourouma, p. 432). The griot-narrator is ridiculing members of the provisional government for failing to realize that in a dictatorship "power can only be limited by power," and not by speeches and champagne parties (Alexis de Tocqueville, p. 136).

There is a close similarity between Kourouma's satiric narrative about the doomed democratic process in the République du Golfe and the historical account of the attempted democratisation of Togo. For example, after the national conference (July to August 1991) had eliminated Eyadema from the presidential election under the democratic process, the Togolese army stormed the residence of the transitional Prime Minister, Kokou Koffigoh, and forced him to carry out Eyadema's mandate by forming a National Union Government. Emeka Nwokedi notes that the command

and composition of the army in Togo was drawn from ethnic and family networks close to Eyadema, and it therefore remained fiercely loyal to the person of the president whose powers were supposed to have been stripped away by the national conference (1994, p. 84). Writing in *The Washington Post*, September 2001, Douglas Farah pointed out that Eyadema maintained control through a combination of state patronage and pampering the army – in which 90 percent of the officer corps and 70 percent of the soldiers were from Eyadema’s minority ethnic group, with his two sons occupying key posts.

Similarly, in a sweeping satiric tone, the narrator in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* shows that Koyaga cunningly takes advantage of the loyalty of the army to destroy the independence of the National Conference and regain his dictatorial powers. Derisively the narrator says:

By night, the soldiery, the Lycaons took the offices of the Prime Minister by surprise ... arrested the Prime Minister ... brought [him] before Koyaga as a boy who has misbehaved is dragged by the ears to face his father. You received him in the manner of a sage, of the father of the Nation. You played the role of the mediator between the army and the Prime Minister. (Kourouma, p. 433)

This event marks the end of the legitimate - if it had been legitimate at all - democratisation process in the République du Golfe. Capturing the similarity between Kourouma’s fictional events in the République du Golfe and the true historical accounts in Togo, Nwokedi notes: “In Togo, Eyadema used the military to reverse progressively the decisions of the national conference thereby recovering almost fully his presidential powers” (1995, p. 85).

What happens after Koyaga has recovered the political initiative is what Souley calls democracy from above, whereby incumbent African presidents adopt the democratization process simply as a “way of conforming, for the sake of form alone, to Western discourse and pressure” (1997, p. 68). However, as has been already noted, Kourouma’s satiric narrative shows that as much as international forces played a big role, there were also pressing domestic factors that compelled Koyaga to agree to the process of democratisation in the République du Golfe. For

example, the bad state of the economy and the failure of both public and private sectors to meet their salary obligations to their employees lead the members of the only Union to first petition the president, and then threaten him with a nationwide strike if their salaries continue unpaid. As has been seen, these workers are quickly joined by the *bilakoros*, the permanently unemployed youths who live on the streets. The satiric narrator shows how the complex interaction of domestic and international forces determines the outcome of the democratisation process in the République du Golfe. It is the social chaos caused by the initial implementation of the IMF demands for financial assistance that set in motion the events that subsequently run full circle, and allow Koyaga to remain the undisputed dictator of the République du Golfe.

First, however, the narrator laughs at the precarious position that Koyaga finds himself in before he eventually learns survival tactics. Showing how the poor state of the economy of the République du Golfe and the changed global political climate combine and contribute to the triggering of the democratic process, the narrator says: “[Koyaga] threatens to switch sides, to become a red, to bring in the Cubans to Africa, Chinese from mainland China, Koreans from Pyongyang if the West does not rush to his aid. Calmly, the diplomats propose that he end the massacres and begin talks with the demonstrators and the opposition. The Cold War is over, done with” (Kourouma, p. 413). In a multiple-edged satiric attack, Kourouma is able to mock Koyaga’s lack of understanding of global politics, the West’s hypocritical and self-serving politics, and the opportunism of the internal forces opposed to Koyaga.

Kourouma’s satire derives its power by showing that it is not only the “ignorant” poor populace of the République du Golfe that display a lack of genuine commitment to the loftier democratic principles, but that even the well-established Western democracies and their financial institutions seem to lack firmly grounded democratic principles. This is seen when it becomes obvious that the opposition will not dislodge Koyaga from power. The griot-narrator says: “Even international bodies, the UN, the IMF, Amnesty International, the International Human Rights League, began to moderate their attacks on the regime and on the President of the Republic” (Kourouma, p. 434). Acknowledging the important role that Western powers play in the development of democratic institutions in Africa, Richard Joseph

notes that external forces in the democratisation of Africa use different strategies to narrow the options available to the recalcitrant regimes and to encourage and bolster insurgent groups. He adds however, that external forces are “also prepared to subordinate democracy to other geostrategic considerations” (1999, p. 246). Part of Kourouma’s satire on the democratisation of the République du Golfe targets this lack of single-minded commitment by Western democracies and their donors which enables Koyaga, and other African leaders, to survive the early 1990s democratisation whirlwind.

Kourouma clearly advocates a multi-dimensional approach to the study of the post-1989 African democratisation processes. This is more so when one considers that almost all the players involved in the game seem to lack a genuine commitment to real democratic ideals as defined in the opening pages of this chapter. For example, Kourouma shows that dictators like Koyaga soon learn how to concede without succumbing to both external and internal pressure. Commenting on this ironic situation, Souley says: “Democratisation thus becomes a subject of reverse blackmail, since while extra-African powers use democratisation to apply pressure on the poor countries, the latter can also instrumentalise the democratic process to get the most out of the donors” (1999, p. 69).

The satiric narrator in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* demonstrates that Koyaga has no intention of opening up the political playing field; he only bends to international and national pressure as a calculated move to buying time while waiting for division to develop among his opponents. Summing up Koyaga’s political tactics, the griot-narrator mockingly employs the traditional wisdom of proverbs in addressing Koyaga, and says: “You are a hunter, you know the virtue of patience. He who can bear the smoke may indeed warm himself on the embers. You decided to leave the situation to rot, and you know that an elephant does not decompose in a day” (Kourouma, p. 417). Some commentators of African politics believe that aspirant life presidents appear to be converted to multiparty politics only as a stratagem in the old game. They note that when democrats stand on the brink of political victory tyrants usually convert and pose as champions of democracy themselves. The griot-narrator in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* foregrounds the fact that, although under extreme internal and external pressure,

Koyaga is not easily beguiled by foreign financial assistance into destroying his dictatorial regime.

In the last section of *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, Kourouma also seems to be mocking the inability of the different democratic forces to be any lasting threat to the personal rule of many African dictators. In a discussion that compares international and domestic pressures in the democratisation process in Africa, Michael Bratton observes:

Pluralist constitutional democracy in Africa represented a real challenge to autocratic regimes for no more than three years after 1989. By the end of 1992 most leaders learned how to control the process of competitive elections so that they can win a grudging stamp of approval from Western donors but still hang on to power. (1994, p. 10)

Kourouma's satire in the last part of the novel gets its power from a griot-narrator who apparently celebrates Koyaga's ability to master a wide range of survival skills and to weather the storm of democracy.

As has already been argued, the satiric narrator persistently points to the inherent irony in the République du Golfe's democratisation process sponsored by the West. The economic hardships that are brought by the IMF-funded SAP programme at first undermine Koyaga's patronage system, thereby threatening his personal dictatorship. However, as events unfold, the SAP-induced economic problems and social unrest help Koyaga regain his popularity when these troubles lead people to start longing for the relatively calm dictatorship days. Commenting on this paradoxical situation, the griot-narrator says: "The economic crisis, exacerbated by the social unrest, had drained the country, making it difficult for the poor. And all of these little people were now wishing for the time of the dictatorship" (Kourouma, p. 434).

Commenting on how African despots learn to survive while apparently conceding, Joseph says: "While the 1990-91 period could be described as "stunning" because of the way entrenched regimes were swept away, since 1992 the struggle has

become more evenly matched as African leaders constantly devise new ways to submit without succumbing” (1999, p. 252). The griot-narrator shows that Koyaga owes his survival as a dictator to various factors, as has been argued throughout this discussion. Kourouma’s satire seems to contradict the popular theories that the stabilization and structural programs that African authoritarian governments were forced to implement as conditions for loans from the multinational agencies steadily eroded their popular support (Joseph, 1999, p. 245). In Koyaga’s case, the paradox is that the economic misery caused by SAP leads to the revival of his popularity when common people come to equate the failure of SAP economic programmes with the democratisation process.

In addition to the boomerang effect of SAP that unintentionally restores Koyaga’s popularity, Koyaga uses rigged elections so as to appear to be converted to multiparty democracy and continue to enjoy the financial support of the West. Rigged election results make dictators certain of remaining in power indefinitely. Mock-praising Koyaga’s shrewd survival tactics, the griot-narrator says: “You were certain, even if you did not rig the elections, to be returned as Head of State at the next elections” (Kourouma, p. 434). Kourouma satirizes how African tyrants went through a rapid conversion process and overnight became champions of liberal governments upon realizing that further resistance to the democratisation process would lead them to losing everything. Gerardo Munch notes: “African leaders [after 1992] began to advise each other how to hold elections without being voted out of office” (in Hyden, 2006, p. 100).

In a discussion of the Western-sponsored democratic programmes in Africa, Laurence Whitehead argues: “Policies aimed at ‘promoting democracy’ ... are likely to constitute an open invitation for manipulation by local political actors, including such practices as staged elections whose results are predetermined” (1999, p. 248). After the turmoil of the failed democratisation process, Koyaga expresses arrogant confidence about winning the ‘democratic elections,’ indicating that the results of these elections are a foregone conclusion. He says: “I will soon be democratically elected, I will have all the power of old” (Kourouma, p. 438). Kourouma scoffs at the hybrid brand of democracy that emerges in Africa as the dictators use the multi-party system to legitimate their old dictatorial powers.

In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, Koyaga's eventual ability to master the strategies of rigging elections and continue to get Western financial aid is symbolized by his quest to recover the old Qur'an and the aerolite after the disappearance of the marabout Bokano and his *maman*. Addressing Koyaga, the satiric narrator says:

When you have recovered the Qur'an and the aerolite, you will ready yourself for the democratic presidential elections. You will seek a new mandate secure in the knowledge that you will triumph, that you will be re-elected. For you know, you are certain, that if by chance men refuse to vote for you, the beasts will come from the jungle, will lay their hands on the ballot papers and will elect you by a landslide. (Kourouma, p. 445)

The satiric narrator appears to be celebrating Koyaga's capacity, even with his hands tied, to manipulate both his external and internal detractors by playing on their perceptibly suspect commitment to democracy, and also by taking advantage and encouraging their divisions and rivalries. In addition, the painful irony of the novel's title, *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, is brought out with full force in the above passage. After having learned to concede without succumbing, African post-colonial dictators developed a daring confidence in their ability to determine the outcome of any voting process. Through the title of the novel, therefore, Kourouma mocks African dictators' appropriation of a democratic instrument to achieve dictatorial ends.

The actions of African dictators on hearing and believing that the last assassination attempt on Koyaga's life has been successful lend support to the conclusion that the Qur'an and the aerolite operate at a symbolic level in the text. When Koyaga escapes this latest assassination attempt, as he has escaped many more in the past, he decides to lie low for two days so that his enemies will expose themselves, thinking that this time he is truly dead. Using this ruse, Koyaga is able to murder a lot of his opponents who unwisely expose themselves. However, the satiric narrator shows that his ploy also backfires, since other African dictators start to believe that one of the most envied dictators in the whole of African continent has at last been vanquished. Addressing Koyaga about the apocalyptic scene that characterizes his

native village on the third day after the attempted assassination attempt, the griot-narrator says:

Every dictator wanted to become the heir to the invulnerability, the sorcery which had always saved you. Each wanted to get his hands on the *maman* and her aerolite, the marabout and his Qur'an ... each had sent the most senior member of his secret service and his chief of police to your native village. All these secret agents swarmed around your residence and the houses of your *maman* and the marabout. They rummaged, ferreted, combed through everything bush by bush, tuft by tuft, termites' nest by termites' nest. (Kourouma, p. 439-40)

The satiric representation of the dictators' search for Koyaga's source of invulnerability symbolizes their determination to survive the democratisation process with all their old powers intact.

The complete chaos that reigns in the game park near Koyaga's native village when people think that he is dead at last seems to be symbolic of the final collapse of the democratic process in the République du Golfe. This scene, where all type of wild animals apparently head towards Koyaga's residence, is characterized by profound irony. Earlier in the novel the reader is made aware that Koyaga, as a master hunter, begins his political career by killing not only the four monsters that terrorize the Tchaotchi villagers, but that he also "killed, widowed and orphaned many antelopes, apes and boars ..." (Kourouma, p. 79). Paradoxically, these very animals that he killed, widowed and orphaned are portrayed as coming to seek refuge at the residence of the master hunter. Describing this puzzling scene, the griot-narrator says:

All animals on the reserve were heading, as it were, towards the residence ... Among these, walking alongside them, were herds of antelope ... herds of great plain buffaloes ... droves of Egyptian hares ... bands of chimpanzees ... turtles ... snakes ... flights of gulls ... crows and still others. (Kourouma, p. 442)

This scene, which borders on magical-realism, seems to be emblematic of Koyaga's final triumph over the democratic forces that almost remove him from of power. Explaining this situation, the narrator says:

In the distance a colossal brush-fire had set the horizon ablaze, shrouding the mountains and the setting sun. It was the inferno of the flames that the beasts were fleeing. The animals were caught or pursued by thousands of peasants equipped with an assortment of weaponry; peasants in the thick of the hunt of the century.
(Kourouma, p. 442)

This scene can be interpreted as symbolic of the utter chaos that would reign in the République du Golfe if Koyaga were to be swept away in a democratic process, and the satiric implication, therefore, is that the country still needs Koyaga's authoritarian rule, since it apparently prevents the country from sliding into complete social chaos.

The main target of Kourouma's satire seems to be the issue of how African dictators masquerade as the only ones capable of ensuring national peace and security through unifying different interest groups and tribes. The griot-narrator undercuts this pretence by showing that it is just one of the wily survival strategies of dictators under siege. Regarding this tactic, Nwokedi notes:

By raising the spectre of disintegration supposedly inherent in multipartyism, they [African dictators] implied that the one-party state was a successful model worthy of preservation; that the problems of tribalism and ethnicity had either completely disappeared from their states or were already in the process of doing so. (1995, p. 56)

Kourouma's final satiric scene, where the wild beasts try to escape the fire of the poaching villagers by seeking refuge at Koyaga's residence, suggests that there is something inexplicably cyclical in human political affairs. The wild beasts that appear to head towards Koyaga's residence symbolize all the people who now yearn for the restoration of Koyaga's dictatorship after the chaos of democratisation. In

words that capture this puzzling paradox that seem to characterize human political affairs, Arthur Koestler observes: “We seem to be faced with a pendulum movement in history, swinging from absolutism to democracy, from democracy back to absolute dictatorship...” (in Titley, 1997, p. 210).

What Kourouma’s satire on the democratisation process of the République du Golfe has shown is that all the players involved in this process - governments, donors, new African leaders, political parties – have different strategies, expectations and requirements, and that these are most often irreconcilable. Kourouma has shown that “building democracy in Africa is clearly taking place against a background of ambiguities and paradoxes” (Souley, 1999, p. 70).

CONCLUSION

This thesis has interpreted Kourouma's *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* as a mocking and parodic novel. In his mock-epic, Kourouma utilizes proverbs and many other techniques of oral literature to satirize Koyaga and other post-colonial African dictators. In the light of the above, this thesis has suggested the reading of *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* as a demystifying, subversive and questioning novel. Kourouma's writing is full of innovations which persuade the reader to think seriously about the leadership crisis that plagues African post-colonial states.

Furthermore, Kourouma's use of language has also been examined closely in this thesis. His literary style in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* "can be defined as a literature situated between orality and writing" (Eileen Julien, 1992, p. 6). In addition to the many proverbs, Kourouma employs such oral techniques as myth, repetition and song. Using these strategies, he offers a satiric criticism of these African traditional oral modes, and uses them to achieve larger satiric effects in his attack on post-colonial African forms of governance.

This thesis has argued that the first part of *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, where Koyaga fights with and destroys four mythical beasts, and the way he assassinates President Fricassa Santos, read like magical realism. Stephen Slemon argues that magical realism's lack of theoretical specificity and its close link with the perception of living on the margins enables it to work well as a tool for examining the African post-colonial era. In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* Kourouma describes a marginal Africa characterized by economic instability and political uncertainty. Kourouma's narrative shows that, as a continent, Africa continues to play an insignificant role in the global political and economic arena. The attainment of political independence for most Africans did not mean an automatic improvement in their material conditions. The magical realist elements that Kourouma incorporates into his narrative enable him to examine African political developments in a foreshortened historical timeframe which allows his novel to metaphorically contain the long process of colonization, the three decades or so of post-colonial dictatorships,

and the 1990s democratisation agitations. This thesis has also noted how the use of different literary modes is synonymous with satire as a genre in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, this allows Kourouma to replay historical events in a way that reaches back from the present to the near mythic, and now vanished, pre-colonial African traditional epoch.

The way Koyaga and other African dictators pretend to deliver people from colonialism, only to institute worse forms of servitude by misappropriating traditional forms of power, has also been discussed in detail in this thesis. The section of the novel that chronicles the brutalities and atrocities of African dictators, stretching from the northern-most part of the continent up to the very centre of Africa, has also been given a whole chapter. It has been argued that Kourouma presents his fabricated satirical narrative of Africa's recent history in mythical terms because a purely realist mode of writing cannot adequately describe the heinous atrocities of this era. In his discussion of post-colonial literature's penchant for using magical realism, Stephen Slemon argues: "Given the very unappealing nature of real history, this preference for fabrication is entirely understandable" (2003, p. 412).

The griotic and satiric method of speaking from the periphery of political power has also been highlighted in this thesis. Insofar as the griot and the satirist "speak from the margin, from 'other' than 'the' or 'a' centre" they also share numerous features with most postmodern literary artists" (D'Haen, 2003, p. 194). Kourouma's griotic and satiric methods allow him to empower the powerless, and to give a voice to the African masses. The fantastic tale or *donsomana* that Bingo the griot-narrator spins is a subversive tool that pretends to be speaking the language of dictators, but which through its highly satiric slant voices the grievances of the disempowered people. However, it has been argued that Kourouma's narrative also falls easily within the realist realms, since he does not completely reject realistic conventions, but rather "contaminates them with fantasy and with the conventions of oral story-telling" (Linda Hutcheon, 1988, p. 208).

Another observation that has been made by this thesis is that *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote's* ingenious fable-like methods interrogate the ways in which history is constructed. In the case of Africa, this history has been constructed through folklore,

oral epics, chronicles of Muslim and European traders, records of European Christian missionaries and colonial officials, as well as by the historiographers of post-colonial dictators. By presenting a mock-epic, Kourouma suggests that oral histories may be no more reliable in their retelling of the past than the recorded histories of preserved facts kept by both the colonizers and post-colonial dictators. Furthermore, Kourouma's mock-epic demonstrates that "orature, like any other form of discourse, is not politically innocent" (Wright, 2004, p.803).

As suggested earlier in this thesis, despite Bingo's obvious attempt to try and dissociate himself from sycophants and toadies, the oral history which he recounts in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is not a repository of African values that opposes Western written knowledge systems. Rather, this thesis has demonstrated that griots, in both the pre-colonial and post-independent epoch, are largely on the side of political power. In contemporary Africa, the griot becomes the modern writer who uses his or her literary knowledge to prop up brutal post-colonial dictatorships. Viewed in this light, the use of a griot-narrator by Kourouma is an imaginative literary method which suits his polemical needs since Bingo, the narrator, self-consciously uses selective historical constructions for satiric effect and thereby raises doubts about their authenticity. The satiric comment that Kourouma seems to be making is that "given the immensity of Africa's historical vacuum, and the impossibility of objectivity" (Wright, 2004, p. 80), Bingo's mock-epic of Koyaga and other African post-colonial dictators may be as accurate as celebrated by oral epics regarded as authentic. In *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, Kourouma is therefore neither rehabilitating indigenous traditions nor rejecting them, but rather showing that they have been implicated in the brutalities and terrors of the post-colonial era.

In an attempt to understand Kourouma's satiric method of highlighting the bodily and the grotesque, Bakhtin's notions of the carnivalesque and the grotesque body have been extensively used in this thesis. Bakhtin's theory that European carnivals were basically subversive, if not outright revolutionary, has been helpful in examining Kourouma's use of the *donsomana*, which shares a number of features with the carnivalesque. Bakhtin's view that the grotesque body is a double-edged tool for both degradation and regeneration has illuminated Kourouma's satirization of some of the despicable brutalities of post-colonial African dictatorships.

That ideals will never provide solutions to post-colonial African leadership problems has also been shown to be a major aspect of Kourouma's satiric narrative in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*. He traces the establishment of African post-colonial dictatorships to multiple sources, such as unfavourable African traditions, indigenous historical legacies of corruption and violence, the bad example provided by violent colonial invasion and administration, and the neo-imperialism and materialistic individualism that are fostered by Western capitalism. This thesis has emphasized how Kourouma's narrative acknowledges the complex nature of the post-colonial leadership crisis, and highlights the seemingly blocked path to effective governance and economic growth by refusing to offer simplistic remedies to the problems that it so candidly describes. Kitenge-Ngoy's view of the literature that has come out of dictatorial post-colonial Africa is clear: "Of one thing we can be sure: the literature that emerges one day from the truly democratic Africa will differ from that of the current literature of disappointment and disillusionment" (1996, p. 181). In line with Kitenge-Ngoy's argument, this thesis has tried to show that literature is indeed a product of its context, that is, material, political, social and economic conditions have a huge influence on what kind of literature is produced at any given time.

However, this thesis has also tried to show that while Kourouma's literature is intensely pessimistic about Africa's future in the hands of dictators, his satire refuses to be pigeon-holed into the narrow description of post-independence disillusionment literature. This is evidenced by the fact that Kourouma's satire goes as far back as the pre-colonial era and shows that African history, if not world history, has generally been filled with disappointment and disillusionment. The generally sad human condition that is fictionalized by Kourouma in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is aptly expressed by the pessimistic words of the 18th century English writer, Horace Walpole: "The wicked wit of man always studies to apply the results of his talents to enslaving, destroying or cheating his fellow creatures" (in *The Awake Journal*, October 2007, p. 6). Kourouma's satire in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* can therefore be seen as examining what it means to be human in general, and what it means to be African in particular.

That Kourouma is concerned with broader issues other than the specific brutalities of post-colonial African dictators is suggested by the fact that the first instance of brutality in *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* is levied against the European colonizers. Their inhuman treatment of Tchao, Koyaga's father, and their wanton destruction of the Mountain People's way of life has been highlighted in this thesis, and it has been suggested that Kourouma sees it as an act of brutality that equals, if not surpasses, the atrocities of African post-colonial dictators.

Kourouma's narrative, it has been argued, implies that because of the oppressive and exploitative nature of colonial rule it was easy for pseudo-nationalists to rally people behind their narrow schemes and oust the colonizers. Commenting on how the abusive nature of colonial rule created opportunism and lack of a real vision of an Africa the people wanted to establish after the departure of the colonizers, Derek Wright says: "During the years of anti-colonial struggle African nationalist leaders had a better idea of what they were fighting against than of what they wanted to replace it with" (2004, p. 797).

As a result of this easily recognisable enemy, Africans united to overthrow the colonizers and naïvely looked forward to a future of hope and happiness, never seriously considering the complexities of post-colonial political administration. Kourouma's satire derives its strength by showing that the 'happiness ever-after' era that most people hoped for at the end of colonialism was, and may never be realized by the majority of Africans. People's material conditions remain the same and at times have deteriorated, as European colonial dictatorships were almost automatically replaced by the dictatorships of the black elite who masquerade as nationalist liberators. The dictators in Kourouma's *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* do not only sow political confusion in the African continent, they also plunder the economic resources of their countries and commit dreadful human rights abuses.

This thesis has also argued that Kourouma's narrative shows that the poor political and economic performances of African post-colonial governments led directly to the democratic agitations which started in 1989. The clamour for more democratic forms of government occurred because "for the majority of Africans independence did not bring unity, social justice, peace, or prosperity, but division, inequality, political

violence, and economic stagnation” (Wright, 2004, p. 797). However, Kourouma’s satire shows that, as with the anti-colonial struggle, the anti-dictatorship struggle is characterized by opportunism and lack of a clear vision of how a democratic system works. Kourouma portrays the majority of people as lacking both democratic knowledge and skills, or as having no determination or will-power to see the democratic project through. Both democratic leaders and the masses are depicted as only concerned with their immediate self-interest. The ironic result for most African countries is that democratisation processes fail, and dictatorships flourish again under the new guise of democratically elected governments.

After reading Kourouma’s *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, it is easier to visualize nightmares instead of imaginary perfect social and political systems for Africa. This may lead to the novel being read as reactionary and an expression of post-modernist scepticism. However, it must be observed that the leadership crisis that grips post-colonial Africa, and the general turbulence in the world’s social and political systems, offer very little to make one optimistic about the future. Robert C. Elliot notes that developments in the 20th century, which spilled over to the 21st century, have led to widespread scepticism towards utopian possibilities. He argues: “To believe in utopia one must have faith of a kind that our history has made nearly inaccessible” (in Bookwer, 1994, p. 16). Kourouma captures this gloomy picture by not only satirizing the atrocities of post-colonial African dictators, but by also showing that so-called democratic systems and societies “can have their nightmarish sides” (Booker, 1994, p. 20).

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